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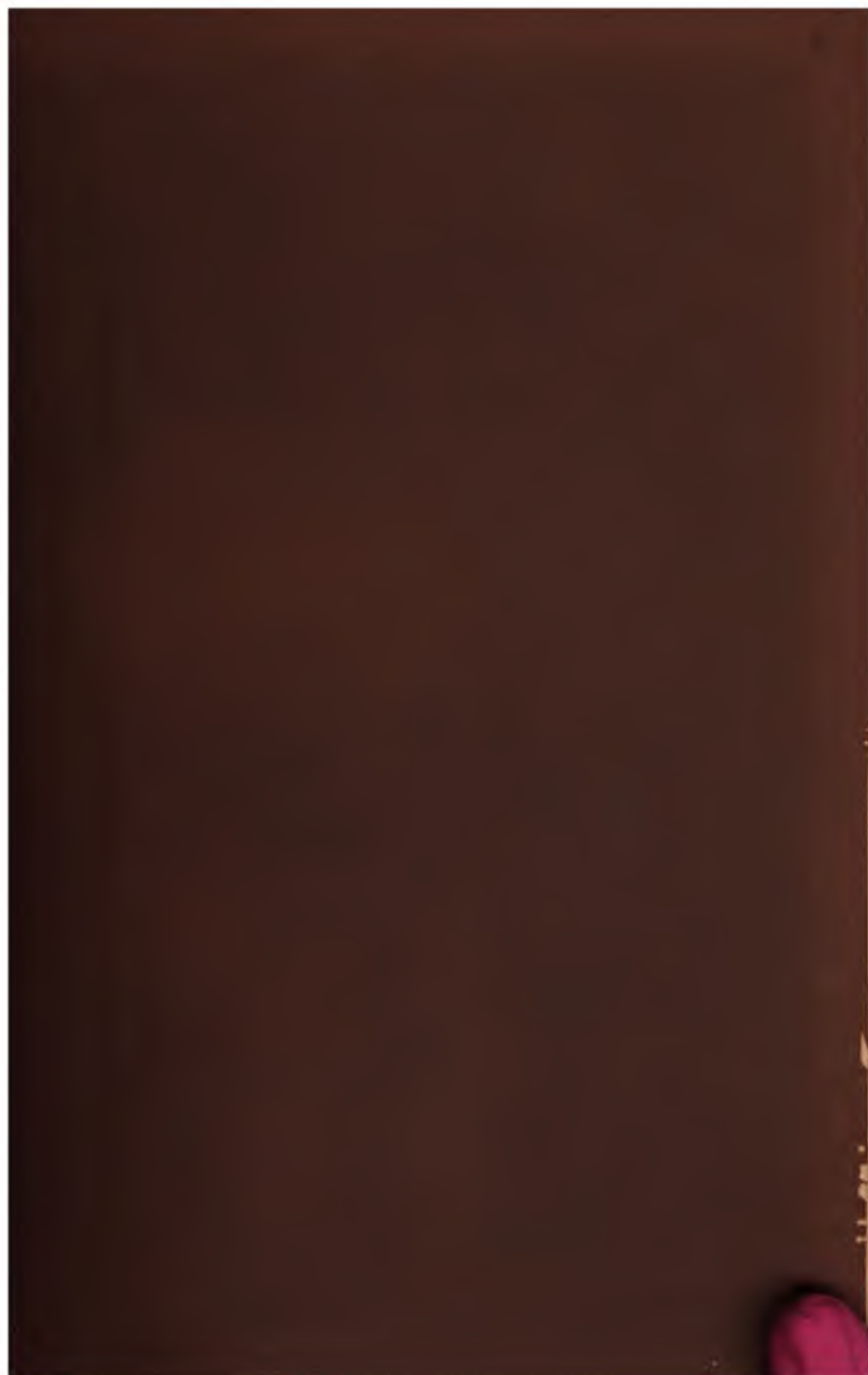
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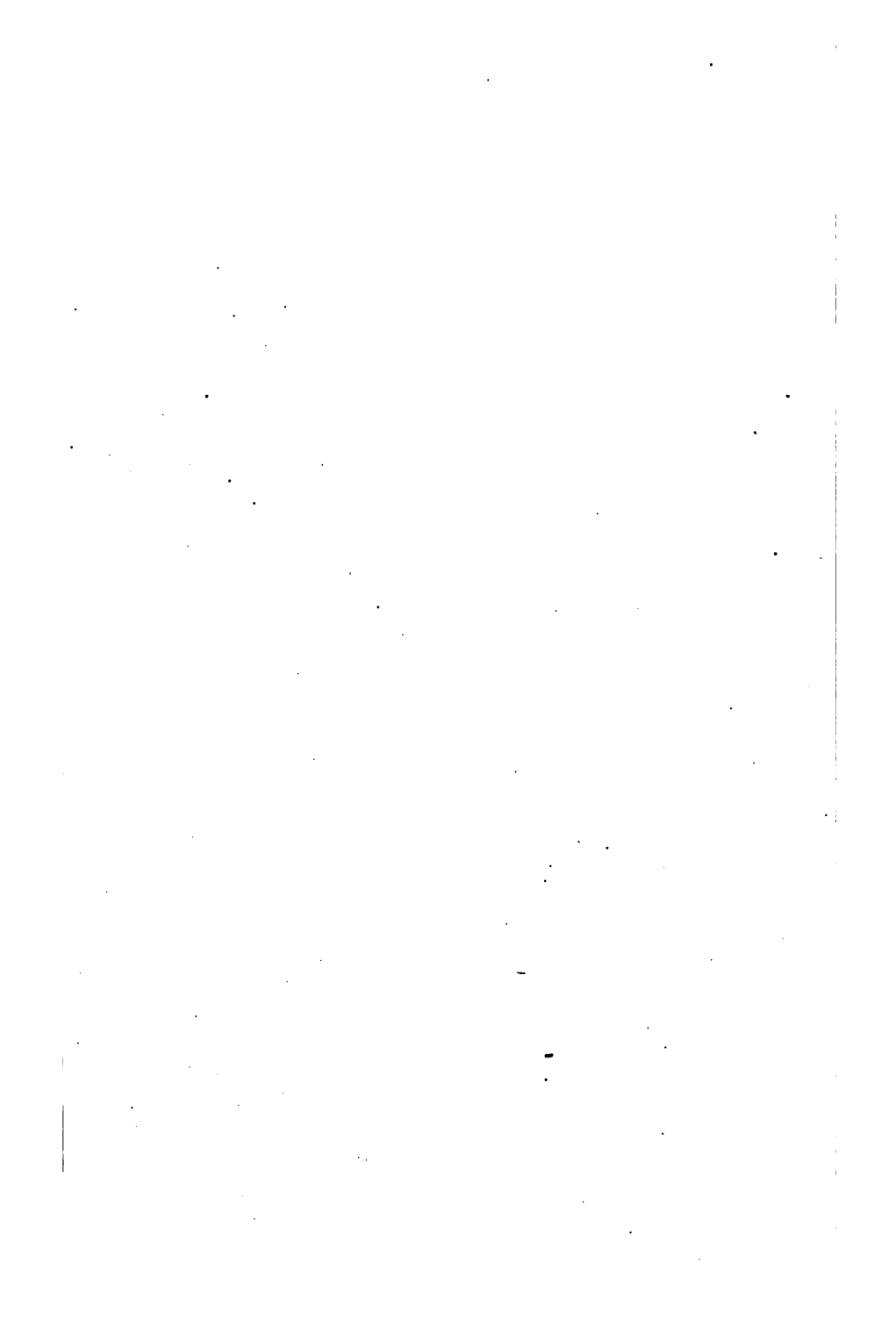




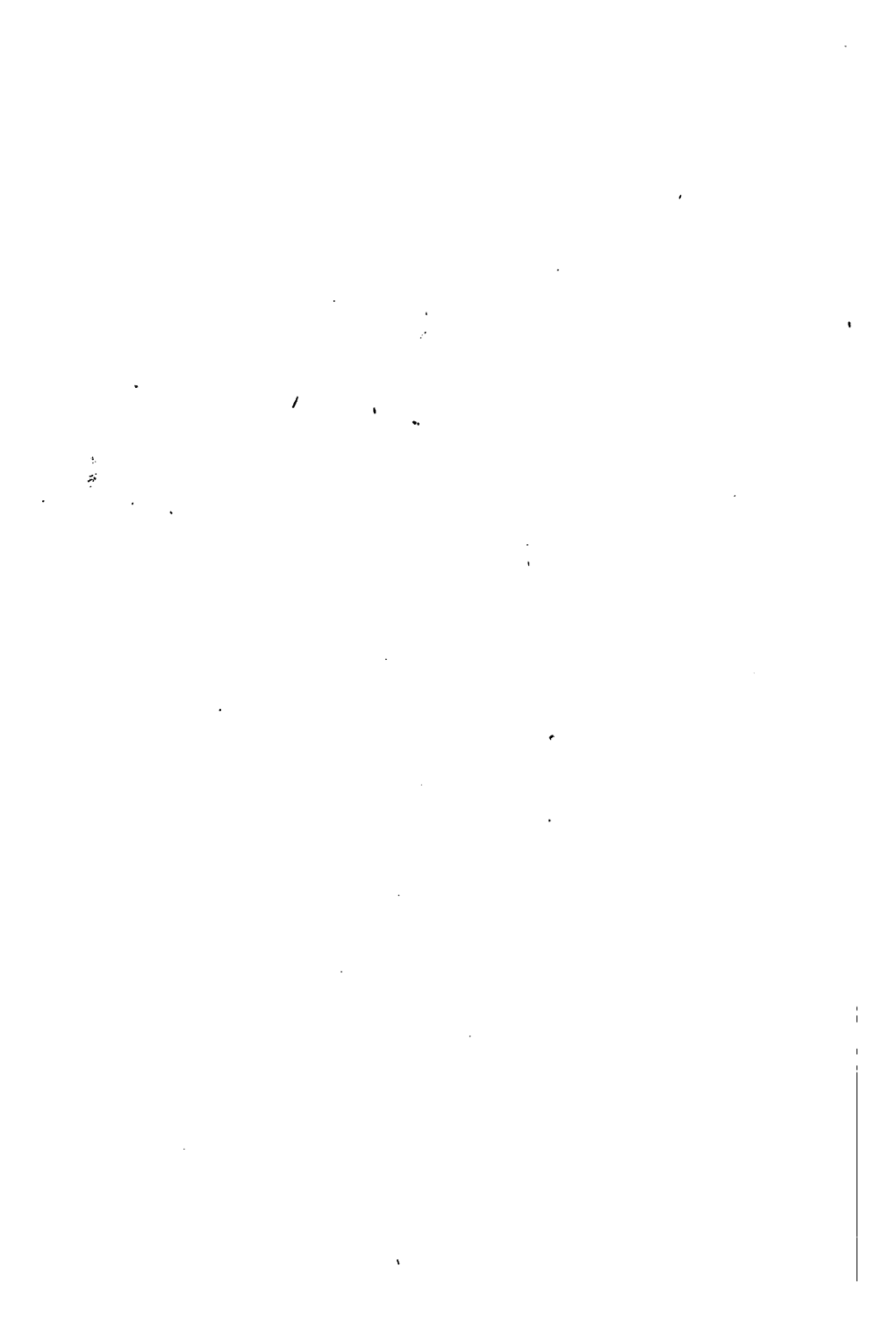
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IN THAT STATE OF LIFE.



IN THAT STATE OF LIFE.

By HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

AUTHOR OF "CONFIDENCES," "MR. AND MRS. FALCONBRIDGE," ETC. ETC.



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IN THAT STATE OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

IN one of the fairest districts of England, on the borders of Devon and Somerset, and hard by the sea, lies the noble estate of Mortlands. It is noble, but gloomier than words can paint. In the winter the sun does not rise upon the narrow valley overshadowed by dark wooded hills till near noon, and leaves it before three o'clock. The sea-winds rush up this narrow gully from a rocky shore, and whistle among the chimneys of the great house, built of hard grey stone—an uninteresting, uncompromising structure, which has scarcely submitted to take a lichen unto itself in the course of fifty years. The chief windows face the north, and within view of them is no flower or fountain, or other sight than a great sea

of shaven lawn, with a broad, flat shore of gravel, unbroken by balustrade or vase. The vast gardens are half a mile away : there are orchid-houses, and ferneries, and acres of glass devoted to all sorts of rare plants, in which the head-gardener feels a just pride, and which visitors at Mortlands are taken to see ; but for any living delight to the eyes of its inmates, these things might as well be in the tropics. To right and left, upon the hills for many a mile, stretch broad oak-woods and rich farm-lands. Sir Andrew Herriesson owns the property here, far as the eye can reach ; and his ancestors, for some hundred years, have owned it before him. They are well-known in the county as a wealthy race, and proud—not too proud to have added to their original wealth by intermarriage with heiresses of a plebeian stock—but too proud ever to have permitted such marriages, minus money plus love ; too proud ever to associate on terms of equality with their poorer neighbours ; too proud to be popular with any sort or condition of people.

Sir Andrew, however, as every one knows, married for love, or for something which, in his nature, was understood to represent that sentiment ; in other

words, he married a poor woman. But then, though poor, she was well born, and well widowed, her late husband being a scion of the noble house of Pomeroy, and her own family "curiously old," as they say of wine. Instead of money, Mrs. Pomeroy brought for her portion good looks, graceful manners, a weak brain, a weaker will, and a stepdaughter. This stepdaughter, Maud, at the time of Mrs. Pomeroy's second marriage, was fifteen. The little money which Mrs. Pomeroy had was her own. This child of her husband's, by an early and imprudent marriage, had not a farthing. Mr. Pomeroy had originally the small property of a younger son, but this he ran through very soon, living upon his second wife's fortune (fortunately settled upon herself), which just enabled them to subsist. The life of the stepmother and daughter, for four years after the link between them had snapped, was uncomfortable in all ways. Mrs. Pomeroy was not unkind to her stepdaughter. On the contrary, she wished and tried to do her duty by the girl. But there was no point of sympathy between them. The woman was pliant, vain, and childish; the girl was wilful, outspoken, and intolerant of all the shams and subterfuges which straitened

circumstances entailed on a lady of Mrs. Pomeroy's turn of mind. Then came the change. The widow married; and, notwithstanding the pleasant relief from all anxiety about butchers' and bakers' bills, which the child had shared with her stepmother, Maud found that, in the splendid monotony of Mortlands, she looked back with bitter regret to the old shifty days of poverty and freedom which she had hitherto known.

Maud had not received a good education in any sense of the word. She had not even had a fashionable one; the widow's means having been unable to compass anything beyond some dancing lessons, and an old French daily governess, with whom Maud read aloud—an accomplishment which, curious to say, materially affected her after life. In other respects she was ignorant, and she knew her ignorance; but with that energy which the self-taught always possess, she set herself to work, when about sixteen, to repair the omissions of her childhood, and whatever she applied herself to she mastered by sheer force of will. Yet she was not what the world considers very clever. She had read comparatively few books, and she never talked of any she had not read. She never expressed

the cream out of Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, and whipped it into trifle for conversation. She had a strange fearlessness in saying what she thought; but her thoughts were often too unconventional to be available coin in society, where the smallest change passes the most readily. Therefore it often came to pass that she was silent, and looked upon as stupid or morose. Her pride was as great as Sir Andrew's, but it was pride of another kind—pride in which he could have no part or sympathy. A rejection of all the world's doctrines and ways of thought, an intolerance of opinions that would not stand the test of clear and honest argument, but took refuge behind expediency and the like; such was the girl's pride, dauntless and scornful, and growing more so every day by reason of her surroundings. She did not love her stepmother much; Sir Andrew not at all. A child may feel the intellectual inferiority of its mother, and no great harm ensues. When the inferiority is moral, there can be but one result. Maud had never known her own mother, but Lady Herriesson had stood in this light towards her since she was four years old, and Maud despised her—despised her for her marriage, and yet more for her adoption, without

scruple, of all Sir Andrew's worldly views. And although Lady Herriesson was really fond of her stepdaughter in her feeble weak-backed way, she had grown to regard her a little with the eyes of Sir Andrew, as a sadly headstrong girl, who had imbibed all sorts of dangerous notions, Heaven only knew where! and whose future was a very present source of anxiety. She sighed much when she thought of Maud, and yet more when she talked of her, which she did with great candour to some of her friends, who afterwards dilated to the world at large on Sir Andrew's forbearance towards "that headstrong, unmanageable girl," and on that sweet Lady Herriesson's cross, in being burdened with such a stepdaughter.

They were right: Sir Andrew's forbearance was great. Seen from his point of view—considering all he had done—it was almost apostolic, this forbearance. He had married Mrs. Pomeroy from her lodgings at Torquay, where she had nothing but her miserable four hundred a year; he had not sent her daughter to school, as many a man would have insisted on doing, but had taken her to live at Mortlands with them; he had given her a horse to ride,

and had sent her to London in the season, and had even had a ball in honour of her introduction to society. Sir Andrew could not forget these things. And therefore did his forbearance appear apostolic in his own eyes when he spoke to Lady Herriesson of his stepdaughter's opposition to all his wishes and opinions. Two natures, indeed, more diametrically adverse to each other could not be found. All that was established by usage, all that the world accepted as right and fitting, found favour in the eyes of Sir Andrew Herriesson. A hard, just man, a magistrate, an active visitor of gaols and reformatories, a subscriber to numberless charities, schools, and institutes, this county Pharisee thanked Heaven, every morning, that he was not as other men were; but that in him all might behold Justice, Virtue, and Munificence personified. He could lose his temper, like better men, at times, and, under provocation, could use strong language. The provocation, however, must be very great. In this instance, the humiliating spectacle of a great and good man, mastered by his passion, was not often afforded to the world. He was dull and pompous, but then he relished dulness and pomposity. A joke was a very

terrible thing in his hands. He talked after dinner to the three or four neighbours who were occasionally invited to his table, of subsoiling, and prison discipline, the disease in the potatoes, and the prospects of the coming election. He read *The Times*, and the reports of select committees; and he rode once or twice a week into the county town of Scornton, nine or ten miles off, on a small, powerful grey cob, followed by a stately groom, mounted upon a horse seventeen hands high. Four great parties were assembled at Mortlands in the course of the year, in the formation of which the social importance of the guests was the only consideration, and very grand cheerless assemblages they were. The rest of the year, except two months in London, was passed in almost complete solitude by the family at Mortlands. One or two neighbours—men who laughed at Sir Andrew behind his back, but who never failed to accept his invitations—were occasionally asked to dinner: never when the four great festivals were being held, but at odd seasons, when Sir Andrew chanced to meet his humbler brother-magistrates on the bench, or at some public meeting in the county town. The rector of the parish (who had another

living some four miles distant, where he resided) and the curate, Mr. Miles, who lived in a cottage at the park gates, over against the church, were likewise bidden to the great man's table from time to time, Miles rather more frequently than the others; perhaps by reason of his proximity, and that it was convenient to send to him when there was an odd number at table; partly, no doubt, because he was unmarried. Not very often were the rector's wife and daughters included in the reverend gentleman's invitation, but once a year, at least, that ceremony was gone through. Why did any of them—they, or poor old Squire Hepworth's family at the Grange, or the Dykes, who were as good a race as the Herriesons, only impoverished by two generations of spend-thrifts—why did any of them endure an ordeal which they regarded with nervous apprehension for days beforehand, and which was productive of neither profit nor pleasure? Because, like Nebuchadnezzar, we set up a golden idol, and call upon all men to bow down and worship it.

Maud had not one friend among all these neighbours. Perhaps this was her fault; no doubt, some of them were better girls than herself, but she won-

dered why they ever came to Mortlands, and, with her independent habits of thought, she found nothing in any of them to encourage intimacy. Hers was a quick, strong nature, loving life, and all real human interests in a hearty way. She felt a slow fire consuming her, under the snow of those altitudes in which her lot was now cast. She would have worked her fingers to the bone in any cause which she felt keenly; and Fate had ordained that she was to sit with her hands before her, and consume the feverish restlessness of youth in inaction. One of her few pleasures was riding. Hunting would have been good for her, by letting off some of the steam in her nature, which was always threatening to explode; but Sir Andrew objected to this, so she took long solitary gallops on the downs, followed by her groom, and her deer-hound Oscar.

As to her looks, some pronounced her beautiful, others could find nothing to admire but her figure. She was straight as an arrow, her limbs well hung, her carriage very erect, a bust like that of the Venus of Milo, and smaller ankles than the Greeks ever recognised as admirable. She had, moreover, to complete the picture of her person, finely-shaped,

capable hands, that looked better out of gloves than in them, a clear complexion, a swift, keen glance; and a charming mouth when she smiled.

She was now twenty-two, and it was just seven years since she first came to Mortlands, a raw girl, emerging from childhood, sanguine, joyous, and impatient of control. Those seven years had formed her character, not altogether to its advantage. They had nipped it, as cold winds and an uncongenial soil nip the tender shoots of a flower transplanted from a warmer climate.

The village of Mortlands is very small; it begins just outside the park-gates (the curate, Mr. Miles's, being the first cottage), and straggles up a steep hill which closes in the valley at the end, some two miles from the great house. It is inhabited chiefly by the families of the farm-labourers on the Herriésson estate, and these labourers, with few exceptions, are well off. The aspect of their cottages shows it, and not less so the cleanly, well-ordered aspect of their children, as you see them trooping into the village school. Maud went occasionally to the village, and would gladly have gone every morning if she could have thought that her going did any good. But

what was there for her to do? Temporal wants there were none; spiritual ones were fully and ably supplied by the Reverend John Miles. Some young ladies, for lack of other sustenance, would have gathered the village gossip, from cottage to cottage, and gone home heavy laden with it, fondly imagining all the time that they were performing deeds of charity and usefulness. But of such was not Maud Pomeroy. For some of these wives and mothers she had a strong personal respect and liking, and when she went to see them she felt that she gained, or ought to gain, far more than she was capable of giving. She listened to their small troubles and trials, and saw how bravely they bore them, and knew that she ought to bear hers as bravely, and that she did not. She murmured at Providence, which had placed her in idleness and luxury when she would have preferred the lot of one of these anxious, hard-working women. She visited them, therefore, because she liked it; the sight of their honest toil was as a tonic to her; she would never permit them to leave off scrubbing or cooking when she came in, and in the cottages which she thus visited it need hardly be said Miss Pomeroy was adored. She and

Mr. Miles often came across each other on these occasions, and he studied her character very closely. With what results it remains to be seen.

John Miles was eight-and-twenty. A more earnest, zealous man in his vocation it would be hard to find, or one better adapted to win his way to the hearts of a country parish. There was nothing dictatorial or interfering in his manner of dealing with the poor. His clear good sense, both in the pulpit, where he had it all his own way, and out of the pulpit, where he was open to argument, recommended him especially to the men, who often came to consult him upon some mundane question. His ready sympathy, and the absence of perpetual fault-finding (that snare of zealous parish priests which, more than anything, wearies out the patience and neutralises the effect of an occasional well-merited reproof), caused him to be a welcome visitor among the women. It was more than respect; they had a positive love for John Miles. And, while in matters spiritual they looked up to him, in matters temporal they felt a kind of protecting pity for his lorn condition. He was "such a nice gen'leman, it's a pity as he hasn't a good missus." But he was not likely

to marry, for reasons that will appear presently. He was looked after by a dumpling-faced little maid, popularly called 'Liza, who worshipped her master, and drew a piteous picture of his loneliness in the long winter evenings, when the night school was over, and he had "never a soul to speak to." But he did not complain; if he had any secret troubles they were hid from every mortal eye; in his dealings with his parish he always seemed cheerful, and encouraged a cheerful view of all human affairs. But he was a shy man, especially so in the society of young ladies. His nose was large and red, his hands and feet were clumsy. He was painfully conscious of these physical defects when he found himself in the society of refined women. It was a weakness against which he fought, but which, even in the pulpit, conquered him at times, when he knew that his nose was redder than usual, and felt that the eyes of his congregation were rivetted on it. Self-consciousness is a misfortune against which religion and philosophy alike struggle vainly. But as soon as John Miles became thoroughly interested, whether in the delivery of his message or in any earnest conversation, he lost all shyness, forgot his

offending extremities, and threw himself, with the force of a strong character, into the discussion in hand.

Maud had a great respect and a sincere liking for the young curate. No one knew better how conscientious, how liberal-minded, and how thoroughly to be trusted he was. The poor were never weary of singing his praises; and she envied the poor their friend. She wished often that she could speak openly to him about herself, and of many difficulties that beset her. But this she had grown to feel would be dangerous.

“I hate my life, and would do anything to escape from it,” she had once said, when writhing under some petty tyranny of Sir Andrew’s. “I am of no use in the world—I wish I were dead.”

They were walking from a poor woman’s cottage together. The young man stopped short, and sighed, and shook his head, and grew scarlet, as he said abruptly, “No one has the right to say that. Every one can be of some use in the world if he chooses.”

“I can’t. What can I do? Mamma doesn’t want me. If I were her own child it would be different. I am a burden to Sir Andrew, and she feels

it. Their only idea now is to get rid of me. If I could only get my own livelihood somehow—if I could only be independent, I shouldn't be so miserable. It is this inaction, this utter stagnation, day after day, which kills me."

John tried to stammer out some good advice; he strove hard to pour oil upon the bruised and irritated spirit of the girl, but after that day she spoke to him but little about herself. How a knowledge of the truth came to her she could not tell: it was nothing that he said or did, but a conviction came upon her that it would be unwise, and unkind towards John, to renew such conversations.

The truth is that this shy, shamefaced curate had been guilty of as great an act of presumption as any man in the counties of Somerset or Devon. He had dared to fall in love with Lady Herriesson's step-daughter. He had been curate here for four or five years: he had watched Miss Poméroy expand from girl into woman; he knew all her faults, her pride, her impatience, her scorn and intolerance of things around her—pricks which it was worse than useless to kick against. And he loved her for her very faults. He saw how they were the shadows, so to speak, cast

by what was large and noble in her character. "Wo viel licht ist, ist starker schatten," as Schiller says. Under different circumstances she might have been, might yet become, an incomparable woman, he thought. Unwise John! with thy sterling sense in the affairs of others, not to crush at once the germs of such folly as this! It was madness, he said so constantly to himself; no one could have a more thorough conviction of that fact. In the first place his person, was it not an insurmountable obstacle against any woman loving him? It was all very well to preach that beauty is as the grass of the field. In the summer time, at all events, most of us prefer verdure to an unlovely barrenness. Then there was his worldly position and prospects; a curacy with two hundred a year; no chance of preferment; no chance of any addition to his income from any source whatever; unless a possible legacy from an old aunt (John's only near relation) might be so regarded. Miss Pomeroy had nothing of her own. Even supposing, therefore, that she could ever have been induced to accept him, it would have been culpable, after the life to which she was used, to drag her down to such poverty as his wife's must be. He knew

this, but he was not the less miserable. He treasured up every word of hers on the days when they met ; and when evening was come, and he sat with *The Times* before him in his chair by the fire, too often there rose up between him and the leading article two proud passionate eyes. At such times the fate of nations was as dust in the balance against the fate of a certain unhappy young lady in the great house two miles distant.

All this gave additional restraint and hesitation to his manner towards Maud at times, additional abruptness to it at others. But however vigilant a guard he might set upon his looks and words, no woman can ever be long deceived in such cases.

Maud Pomeroy was no coquette. To play with the feelings of any man was not sport to her taste, least of all with a man whom she regarded as she did John Miles. She, too, was not without her dream of what love might be ; of some possible man to whom she could be devoted, body and soul, and for whom she would sacrifice the whole world ; but it was not the curate. She revered his character, and honoured his opinions, even when they were diametrically opposed to her own. In discussion

with Sir Andrew, Miles's manly independence of spirit always delighted Maud. She was too much accustomed to see every one bow down before Sir Andrew, not to value the firmness with which a shy and awkward young man opposed many of the arrogant old baronet's pet theories. John Miles's was often a difficult position, sitting at Sir Andrew's table, and hearing opinions broached which he held to be pernicious. The manner in which, without forgetting the respect due to Sir Andrew's age and position, the curate never shrank from pointing out what was fallacious in the baronet's statements, gave Miss Pomeroy a high opinion of his honesty and moral fearlessness. She had talked to him, therefore, with less reserve than she had ever done to any other human being; and it was with sorrow that she found herself compelled to renounce this privilege. She very rarely, now, spoke to him with the same openness as of old. They met in the village and discussed the temporal wants of some old woman, during which interviews poor Miles always appeared to the worst advantage, in the eager desire not to betray his feelings, and to mete out to Miss Pomeroy the same measure he would have accorded to any

other young lady. Or he dined up at the great house, and shuffled uncomfortably with his large feet (in boots to which a good deal of gravel had adhered in his walk) upon the polished oak floors, and crumbled the bread incessantly while he was talking at dinner, which little tricks distressed Maud almost as much as they did Lady Herriesson. At such times he and Miss Pomeroy had seldom much conversation.

One day, however, a circumstance happened which made Maud, in her anger, resolve on applying to the curate for help. Her maid, to whom she was really attached, and who had been a girl out of John Miles's school, had just been dismissed by Sir Andrew for a grave dereliction of duty. She had, contrary to strict orders, which forbade any villagers from entering the park, brought in a party of boys and girls there, surreptitiously, one Sunday afternoon, and had there been discovered by Sir Andrew. He was of those men who pride themselves upon never forgiving a fault in a servant. In vain Maud interceded, supplicated: Mary Hind went away that day month. A few days afterwards Miss Pomeroy met John Miles in the village. She stopped him.

“Poor Mary is gone, Mr. Miles. I did all I

could, but it was no use. My object now is to get her a good place, and you, who knew her in the school, who know what a thoroughly good girl she is, must help me."

"Certainly, Miss Pomeroy. Where is she gone?"

"To an aunt in Bristol. Since her mother's death, you know, she has no home here."

"What is it I can do, Miss Pomeroy? Lady Herriesson gives her a character, I suppose?"

"Not such a one as I think Mary deserves; not one that I think must ensure her getting a good place. Mamma, of course, is guided by Sir Andrew. They both talk about that innocent Sunday walk as if it were the greatest crime!"

John Miles coloured to the roots of his hair, but said, boldly: "The walk in itself was innocent enough, but we must be just, Miss Pomeroy. Disobedience to a direct order, if not the 'greatest crime,' is certainly a very grave offence in a servant."

"I know you think disobedience a very grave offence in *any one*," she said, quickly. "We all ought to do exactly what we are told by those whom chance has placed in authority over us. Only when

there is injustice and tyranny, it is not so easy always to bow down one's head to the yoke."

John paused, and then quietly replied, after some effort: "I don't know about injustice and tyranny, Miss Pomeroy, but the whole condition of servitude seems to me to consist in doing what you are told. It is not chance, but free will that elects that condition, and the servant who takes wages without obeying his master is guilty of a fraud—is not strictly honest."

"Then you will not give Mary a certificate—such a one as I want her to have, Mr. Miles? I can only say your school produces miracles of probity if it turns out many such girls, and I—am disappointed."

He saw that she was annoyed, and it distressed him. She was about to pass on, but he stopped her.

"One instant: pardon me, Miss Pomeroy; you misunderstood me. I shall be too glad, as clergyman of this parish, to give Mary Hind an excellent certificate, having known her, first in school, and then in service, for the last four years, and having always had a high opinion of her. Of the fault which has caused her discharge I only know by hearsay, and therefore can say nothing; moreover, it is not in my province, but in that of her employers, to

state the cause of her leaving them. It was only," he added, colouring again, and with some hesitation, "because I thought, in defending your protégée, you were not quite just to Sir Andrew, that I said what I did."

"I do him full justice," she replied, with a bitter smile. "After I had exhausted my eloquence in trying to induce him to forgive Mary's first misdemeanor—*first*, remember, in three whole years—Sir Andrew reminded me that she was not my servant, but his, that he paid her wages and her board, which argument was, of course, unanswerable. I could only rejoin that he should not be at the expense of another maid for me. I preferred henceforward doing without one. Mamma has been for the last month trying to make me give in, but I won't."

"Do you think there is any merit in that?" asked John, in a low voice.

"I don't know about merit, but I know I was attached to Mary; and I'd rather be independent than have a woman I don't like about me, or, if I *should* like her, to be subject to her being sent off by Sir Andrew. Do you know that he has now forbidden my poor old Oscar to come into the house because

his paws were dirty the other day? It seems to be enough that I should be fond of any creature for it to be banished."

It wrung John's heart to hear her speak thus, but he had to give utterance to other words than those his inmost soul was crying out.

"You must remember that Sir Andrew is not fond of dogs——"

"Nor men either."

"And one ought to try and put one's self, not only in the position, but in the mind, temper, and education of those we judge, Miss Pomeroy."

"What, into their worldliness and narrow-mindedness? It's no use, Mr. Miles, it's no use. I know all you would say, and I suppose you are right, only I can't see things as I ought. I am one of the stiff-necked. Good-by. I am ashamed to have kept you standing here so long. Send me that certificate for Mary, will you?"

She held out her hand, and he took it in silence. Then they went their several ways.

The certificate was sent to Miss Pomeroy, who put it by in her desk until she could hear of a situation for her discharged maid.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Maud Pomeroy said, "Their only idea now is to get rid of me," a very distinct and growing cause of annoyance was present in her mind. Among those important guests who were at least once a year bidden to the great battues of Mortlands, was Mr. Durborough, of Durborough, one of the richest men in the county. He was a widower, of nearly two years' standing, without children, rapidly approaching fifty-five, and resolved to lose no time in replacing the late Mrs. Durborough, who had been of a sickly habit, by some strong healthy young woman, whose appearance should justify the reasonable hope that the direct line of Durboroughs might yet not become extinct. This selection of a spouse upon hygienic principles, akin to those which determine the choice of a wet nurse, and uninfluenced by any other con-

sideration than that of birth—for Mrs. Durborough must be well-born—was, it so happened, easy enough. In very early days after his “bereavement,” as it was called, when on a visit to Mortlands, where he had not been since Maud had come to woman’s estate, he cast the eye of speculation upon her fine well-grown figure, and determined that she was the article he wanted. She was highly connected, and there was a certain fitness of things in the fact that she was the stepdaughter of even a greater man in the county than Mr. Durborough, which clinched the matter in his mind. As to her character, or mental qualifications, he knew nothing, nor did it occur to him to inquire. Neither did the faintest idea obtrude itself upon him that his suit might not be successful. He was Durborough, of Durborough: that was the ruling idea in his mind, which was of the narrowest dimension, and she, though a healthy young woman of high family, was poor and dependent. Did the question admit of a doubt?

After this, it is perhaps unnecessary to say that years did not deal with him as they deal with most of us, sprinkling our hair with that salt which is without savour, and bowing our backs to bear their

increasing burden. Age only dried him up by slow degrees; he was as spare and upright as at thirty; his hair still brown, and his teeth sound; there was no sign of decay in the wiry man of fifty-five.

On this first visit, Mr. Durborough had done no more than cast an eye of speculation, as I have said, on Miss Pomeroy; and then drop a hint to Lady Herriesson, which he left for six months to germinate. And when fifteen months had decently elapsed since his "bereavement," he came again to Mortlands. By this time the hint had borne seed, and multiplied, and many little hints had left their maternal nest, and flown towards Maud. She was therefore prepared as much as possible to avoid the stiff silent man, whom pity for his loss had drawn her to notice occasionally six months before. He took her in to dinner every day: that she could not help; but so speechless was he upon these occasions, that she made up her mind that Lady Herriesson's hopes had led her entirely to misapprehend the worthy widower. Then, again, she relaxed from her severity, and talked to him, and grew easy when she found how little impression her amenities made. So it came like a thunder-clap upon her when Sir

Andrew sent for her to his study, the day on which Mr. Durborough was to leave, and informed her that that gentleman had made a formal proposal for her hand. Amazed as she was, Maud could hardly help laughing at this business-like method of tendering a contract for life; but she simply replied that she must decline the honour Mr. Durborough had done her. Then the baronet asked her why; and condescended to argue with her, as he rarely did with a woman, and when he found his arguments of no avail in changing her resolve, he dismissed her in great anger. But to Durborough, of Durborough, he softened the refusal in such terms as left it to be understood by that ardent suitor that a little maidenly coyness alone rendered Miss Pomeroy unwilling to accept him on so slight an acquaintance.

“Come to us again in February or March,” Sir Andrew had said (it was then November). “Girls like a little pressing, you know—a deuced deal of romance and nonsense about them—high-flown ideas, and all that. They never like giving in all at once; but come again in three or four months’ time, and you’ll find, Durborough, it will be all right.”

Then Mr. Durborough had gone away, if not

satisfied, at least no more than mildly surprised that any girl should be found not to snatch eagerly, even at the expense of maidenly coyness—at the alluring prospect of becoming Mrs. Durborough, of Durborough.

Sir Andrew, from that day forward, trusting to the old Latin adage, that dropping water will wear away a stone, began a system towards his step-daughter, in which he was ably seconded by her mother. Well might Maud declare, “Their only idea is to get rid of me.” Durborough’s merits as a man “universally respected,” Durborough’s lineage, Durborough’s rent-roll, the excellence of Durborough’s venison, the high esteem in which Durborough’s shortorns were held—almost every subject of discussion at Mortlands was a well from which some drop of water was drawn to let fall upon the stone of Maud’s heart. It is astonishing, when you are so minded, how every topic under the sun may be ingeniously made to serve a particular purpose. Maud grew positively to loathe the very name of Durborough. She said nothing; but she felt all the more bitterly how they were trying to force her into this contract, against which body and soul alike rebelled.

And now February had come, and with it, Mr. Durborough in person, by no means anxious as to the result of his visit, but rather with the quiet confidence of a Cæsar. Then Maud knew that a crisis was at hand, when she and her father-in-law would have a pitched battle, compared with which all former encounters were as mere skirmishes. But she was so dead-sick of her life, so weary of the monotony of her days, and of the absence of any strong vital interests, that there were moments when she asked herself whether, after all, it might not be better to go away with this man, and have a home of her own, with a round of active duties, and be independent. Ay, but would she be independent, bound to such a man? She knew that she would not; and it was only for an instant that such an alternative suggested itself. Her nobler nature scornfully rejected the idea. If they wanted to get rid of her, let them do so; she would gladly go out as a governess—earn her bread in any honest way, nay, beg it rather than sell herself, and commit perjury by swearing to love, honour, and obey a man whom she despised.

It was Lady Herriesson who opened the trenches.

In the dusk of the same evening on which

Mr. Durborough arrived, Maud's stepmother called her into her boudoir, on some pretence, and shutting the door, drew her to a sofa near the fire. Lady Herriesson leaned back, and looked away from her daughter, straight into the burning embers. She had a paper-knife in her hand, and she balanced it between her delicate fingers, emphasising what she said occasionally by a weak upraising of the bit of ivory. Maud, on the contrary, sat erect, looking her mother full in the face, with her hands folded on her knees.

“My dear, I hope you have made up your mind to be more reasonable. I hope you have thought seriously, and are prepared to listen to Mr. Durborough, now that he has returned—which, indeed, I am sure is more than any one had right to expect he would do, under——”

“I neither expected nor wished it,” said Maud, quickly.

“It really seems, my dear, like flying in the face of Providence, when everything that we could possibly wish for offers, that you should set yourself against it in this—this shocking way. As Sir Andrew says, what do you expect? Very few girls

have such a chance of settling, and I really must say I think it ungrateful, after all Sir Andrew has done for you, to be so—so obstinate and headstrong.”

“I don’t wish to be ungrateful,” said Maud, with unusual gentleness. “I am very sorry to be a burden to Sir Andrew, and were there any other escape from the position in which I am, but by a marriage which I know would be a sin, depend upon it, mamma, I would too gladly embrace it.”

“A sin, my dear? That is such an exaggerated way of talking . . . you are so very high-flown, as Sir Andrew says. I am sure I am the last person who would urge you to do anything sinful; and if Mr. Durborough wasn’t highly principled, and all that, I wouldn’t press you—I wouldn’t, indeed. A man of that age, as Sir Andrew says, is just what you want to quell your impetuosity; and as to love, love-matches, as a rule, turn out unhappily, there is no denying it. A marriage founded upon respect and esteem——”

“I have no particular respect or esteem for Mr. Durborough. Mamma, let us understand each other. You want to get rid of me; it is very natural. I don’t the least complain. I am in Sir Andrew’s

way, and he makes you feel it, as he does me. It is much better that I should stay here no longer. Send me away, anywhere. Let me go and earn my bread somehow, and be no longer a burden upon your husband; but do not try and force me into this marriage, for I cannot and I will not do it!"

"Really, I don't know what to do, you are so violent, Maud! Who wants you to 'earn your bread?' Such an expression! We only want to see you comfortably settled. It is a great anxiety—of course it is, and I am sure Sir Andrew has done everything for you, you could possibly expect, and it is very ungrateful of you talking in that way."

"I am only saying the truth, mamma, and you know it. . . As to marrying for love, is it expecting too much that there should be *some*, on one side or the other? Mr. Durborough has chosen me like a cow or a horse. For any ardent affection, I might as well marry my grandfather. If I can't love the man I marry, at least he can love me, and I won't marry one who chooses me like a cow or a horse."

She spoke with raillery, but Lady Herriesson knew that the substance of her daughter's words were said in sober earnest. She tried, in a weak

way, to prove that the strength of Mr. Durborough's affection was shown in his return to the charge after a first rebuff, but Maud was not to be taken in.

"He comes back because Sir Andrew did not tell him all I said the first time, and assured him of success, perhaps, if he tried again. He had much better know at once that it is of no use. Will you tell Sir Andrew, mamma, or shall I?"

"Oh, I wash my hands of it," murmured Lady Herriesson, with a helpless, deprecatory movement of the paper-knife. "You must talk to Sir Andrew yourself. I see that *I* have no influence over you; you pay no attention to *me*. And, after all I have done for you, too, as Sir Andrew says——" Here Lady Herriesson put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You are right, mamma. We had better not speak again upon this subject, you and I. It is useless; and I am only tempted to say a great many things I had better not say." With which speech Maud left her mother's boudoir.

But the following morning, after breakfast, in Sir Andrew's study, that battle was fought in good earnest, which was to determine Maud's whole future career.

Sir Andrew stood with his back to the fire, his coat-tails turned up, his face very red, his eyes burning angrily as he looked at Maud, who stood before him. He had placed a chair for her, when she had come in, but she had chosen to stand, and had been standing for the last quarter of an hour. All the veteran force of argument had been brought up, and had charged again and again, and had been repulsed with loss. And now the enemy, inflamed with the rage and shame consequent on defeat, was preparing for a last attack, in which no quarter should be shown.

“Pray, may I ask what you intend to do? Perhaps you mean to marry the red-nosed parson, and live at my park-gates with a swarm of children, and expect me to support you?” (Maud coloured, in spite of herself, as she thought of poor Miles.) “If you do, you’re confoundedly mistaken. If you choose to make some disgraceful marriage, which I suppose you call *romantic*, remember I have nothing further to say to you. I have already done a great deal more for you, and borne your airs with more patience than most men would have done, but I tell you fairly my patience is exhausted—there! Do you know what your position is, young lady? You haven’t a

farthing in the world you can call your own! If it wasn't for me you would be almost starving in a lodging in Torquay! For seven years you have lived in my house, and I defy any one to say I haven't behaved well to you. You've had a couple of horses of your own; I have sent you to London, and paid your milliners' bills; you have never been denied anything you wanted, and this is the return you make me. You won't take a home of your own when it is offered you—a most unexceptionable offer in every respect, with settlements such as you may wait a long time before you get again. Pray, do you think I am going to keep you here, and indulge your confounded romantic rubbish, until some penniless blackguard takes your fancy?"

"Not if I can help it," said Maud, in a voice tremulous with indignation. "I am conscious enough, Sir Andrew, of the obligations under which it has been my fate to be placed towards you, without being so delicately reminded of them—conscious enough to be most anxious to relieve you of the burden of my presence in your house as soon as possible. It cannot be too soon. But I will not relieve you, and myself too, of this burden by marry-

ing an old man because he is rich, and holds out the inducement of leaving me a rich widow some day. I suppose that is what a large settlement means. When I marry, whether it be a ' penniless blackguard ' or not, I shall not look forward to widowhood as the consummation of earthly felicity. And, therefore, once for all, I do not choose to marry Mr. Durborough. I will not sell myself—no, not even to be independent of *you*. But for all that, Sir Andrew,"—here the girl strove in vain to speak calmly, but angry sobs almost choked her,—“depend on it, I shall not continue to trouble you here much longer. After what you have said—and I am glad you have spoken plainly at last—the sooner I leave your roof the better.”

She turned quickly to the door, and had left the study before her astonished adversary could find any fitting rejoinder. She ran upstairs and locked herself into her room. Then she flung herself upon the bed, and the storm, like a great wave, broke over her: the long-pent tears—tears of passion, and humiliation, and anguish—burst forth, until the bed shook under her as she lay and sobbed there with uncontrolled violence.

It had come, then, at last. The crisis which she had long felt was imminent, which latterly, in her restless longing to be free, she had at times almost impatiently hoped for, had come. Words had been spoken which could never be forgotten, and the only thing left for her was to go. No matter how, no matter where, the main point now for her was, as soon as might be, to get out of this man's house, who had reproached her in the coarsest terms with her dependence upon him, and to shake the dust from off her feet in going.

Then, after awhile, the tempest of outraged feelings subsided, leaving the sky, indeed, black and starless, but succeeded by that dead, cold calm in which alone permanent resolves are made. She would write to London by that day's post; she would advertise for a situation of some sort; but what? What was she fit for? Had she the patience and temper to be a nursery governess? Had she the education fitting her to be a schoolroom teacher? In these days of sewing-machines, could she support herself by her needle? She asked herself these and similar questions, turning over in her mind twenty different schemes, and seeing the difficulties that

beset each of them as she sat there, leaning her two elbows on the table, her hot cheek resting on her hands, her keen bright eye fixed upon the wall opposite.

Small accidents determine almost all the serious events of life. *The Times* was a paper Maud never read; but the supplement of *The Times* several days ago had been brought up to Maud's room with some large photographs which she was going to mount; and there it still lay on the table. She had sat nearly an hour, immoveable, opposite this paper, when her eye fell on one of the columns of advertisements. "Wanted," in conspicuous letters, ran all down this column. She drew it towards her, and began wearily spelling down the list of housekeepers, cooks, butlers, gardeners, whose remarkable merits, in their various ways, had hitherto been overlooked by an indiscriminating public. Then came an advertisement of another sort: a single gentleman who wanted a housekeeper; his requirements seemed to be small, only he wished for "a personal interview," and, upon the whole, Maud thought she would not answer this advertisement. She passed on to the next and the next; whatever the advertiser

sought, whether governess, companion, or house-keeper, the necessary qualifications were such as Maud felt she had not. At last she came to the following :—

“Wanted immediately, by a lady resident in the country, a young woman as second lady’s maid, who is a good reader and writes a clear hand. Must make herself generally useful. High testimonials will be required. Address A. C., Post Office, Salisbury.”

She read this twice over. Why should she not answer it? What was it to her whether she were called a servant or not? This sounded like the very thing for her. She could read aloud, and was quick at her needle. And as to making herself “generally useful,” in her present frame of mind she would hail any hard manual labour; had she not often longed for it at Mortlands? She was fit for nothing better than this; she was not gifted or skilled in anything whereby she could earn her bread; but *this* she felt she might conscientiously undertake. And with all her pride, she had none of that particular kind which would have made her hesitate to take this step. Of course, it entailed an entire severance from everything else in her past life. Under

another name, unknown, she would begin a new existence; her mother should hear from her occasionally, but the secret of her hiding should be carefully kept, or she would be prevented from carrying out her intentions; and she was now resolved that she would leave no stone unturned to carry them out, if it were possible.

The chief difficulty that struck her at the outset was the matter of testimonials. How was she to procure such a one as would be satisfactory to the advertiser? Chance came to the aid of her quick intelligence, sharpened as it was by the craving to accomplish this thing. The afternoon's post brought her the following letter:—

“ Bristol, Feb. 14th.

“ DEAR AND HONOR'D MISS.—This leaves Me well, as it hopes to find You. I have got, Dear Miss, *a situation*, but not such as you think, and was looking after, for Me. Mr. Joseph Hart, that is a carpenter in this city, and a good business, has been visiting at Aunt's of Sunday evenings, and him and me is engaged to be married, Dear Miss. He is a little fellow, but he is very Respectable, if You

please, Miss, and he can keep me comfortable, which, and he says I shan't have to do no work, but mind the house. So this, dear Miss, is a better *situation* than ever I expected to get, and our Bands is to be called next Sunday. And knowing you will like to hear it, Miss, I write this, and please to tell Mr. Miles with my duty. And I am with affecte respect,
Dear Miss,

“Your obedt. Servt,

“MARY HIND.”

This letter gave Maud real pleasure. She was not so engrossed by her own selfish troubles as to be unable to smpathise with her little maid, in whose future she had taken so keen an interest, and she sat down and answered that letter on the spot. Then, after a while, an idea struck her, an idea which she at first rejected as unjustifiable, but which, on second thoughts (they are anything but “the best” very often) she deliberately took up again, argued its claims to consideration, and finally adopted. This was the making use of that testimonial which Mr. Miles had written for Mary Hind, now that it could be of no use to the girl, and adopting that name as

her own. That this was a very grave offence, and one punishable by law, certainly never clearly presented itself to Maud's mind. In her eagerness to solve a difficulty which seemed absolutely insurmountable, she caught at an expedient which, if not strictly right, could at least do no harm to any one. All the virtues wherewith Mr. Miles had accredited the little school-girl in his certificate, would he not have amplified upon them largely, had he been writing of Maud? In the character given there was no deception, only in the name of its bearer. And what was in a name? It was thus she argued with her conscience, until she had persuaded it to allow her to make use of the writing in her desk.

She had time to write her letter, and walk with it to the village post—she would not trust to the prying eyes of servants over the post-bag—and back again in the dusk, before the first dinner-bell had rung. But John Miles caught sight of her from a cottage-window, and wondered what could bring Miss Pomeroy to the village post-office at that hour in the evening.

CHAPTER III.

MAUD had no compunction, no doubt or misgiving as to what she had done, when she got home. Her only thought was, "If this fail, what can I do? I must quit Mortlands: but where am I to go?"

Lady Herriesson had been to her daughter's room, but had not found her there. No one had seen her since the morning, for even Maud's courage had not enabled her to come down to luncheon: and her mother, knowing the result of Sir Andrew's attempt to bring Maud to reason, was seriously disquieted. She would be so headstrong! And Sir Andrew's wrath was so justly kindled against her! It was really most distressing. Two ladies who were staying in the house, and who, of course, knew all about it, condoled with Lady Herriesson, and informed the county afterwards how beautifully she had behaved, and how she had succeeded in smoothing matters

over, to all appearance, at least. For, at dinner, Maud came down, looking very much as usual, and though she did not speak to Sir Andrew, she did to Mr. Durborough, and seemed anxious that the evening should pass off as little disagreeably as possible. Of course, every one, down to the footmen behind their chairs, knew that there had been "a jolly row between Sir Andrew and the young missis," and that Mr. Durborough and his acres had been ignominiously rejected by the young lady. The knowledge of this did not tend to make any one feel very comfortable, and Lady Herriesson's preternatural efforts to appear as if nothing particular were the matter, while she furtively glanced at Sir Andrew's scowling face between the flowers of the *épergne*, could deceive no one. But Maud acted the part she had determined to play, courageously, as she did most things; for the short time she should remain under this roof, let there be, at least, peace; she would set a guard upon her tongue, and upon her eyes, both too apt to be delinquents as she well knew; and she would resolutely decline all further discussion with either Sir Andrew, or her mother.

Mr. Durborough ate, as his own servant observed,

“uncommon hearty, for one who’s had the sack given him.” He was silent ; but that he always was ; and it transpired that he meant to return to Durborough the following morning ; this was the only evidence that Sir Andrew had annihilated his hopes, by at last telling him the unvarnished truth. And the next day, he did, after an excellent breakfast, shake hands with the ladies all round, and step into his barouche, rigid and unmoved as ever ; and having recovered from his astonishment at Maud’s conduct, and grown to regard her with the commiseration due to a fitting candidate for Bedlam, he thought of his crops, during at least half of his twenty miles’ drive home.

Lady Herriesson had made one more feeble effort to appeal to her daughter’s feelings that last night, by asking her to come to her room and talk to her, as they were going up to bed. Maud kissed her step-mother.

“Now if it is about Mr. Durborough or Sir Andrew, mamma. . . . More than enough has been said. I had rather not, if you please, discuss the matter any more. Anything else you have to say to me, I will listen to.”

Then had Lady Herriesson sighed, and shaken her head very sadly—as was distinctly witnessed by the two visitors at the top of the stairs; and she and her daughter had parted, and passed onwards.

The following day, the one on which Mr. Durborough took his departure—was without incident worth record. Sir Andrew did not speak to Maud when she came down to breakfast (which, as the visitors agreed afterwards, she fully deserved), and as soon as Mr. Durborough's barouche had driven away, he ordered his horse, and rode into the petty sessions at Scornton. The sharp administration of justice was a wholesome vent to the baronet's irritability, no doubt, for when he appeared at dinner that night, he was very much as usual, and perpetrated two dreary jokes, at which the lady-visitors and their husbands laughed, as in duty bound. These men, being distant connections of Sir Andrew's, must, by all the conventional laws of what is right, stay at Mortlands once a year; but, being persons of no particular consideration, were bidden at what might be called odd times. Their presence now was an inestimable relief to Maud; they were all toadies of the lowest description, who acted as chorus to Sir Andrew or her mother, in

a way that made Maud sick ; but she felt grateful to them now, for they broke that terrible trio.

Immediately after breakfast next morning, Maud hurried down to the village post-office. She had not slept all night ; she was in a fever of excitement. There, sure enough, lay the letter directed, as Maud had requested, to M. H., in a cramped foreign-looking hand, with the Salisbury post-mark, and " Beckworth House " stamped in blue on the reverse side of the envelope. The post-mistress stared as, in reply to Maud's inquiry, she delivered this letter to her, and the young lady walked rapidly away. She tore open the cover ; she could not wait even until she got into the park, but began reading the letter as she went down the street.

" Mrs. Cartaret has received Mary Hind's letter. It is satisfactory ; and so is the testimonial, as far as it goes ; but it says nothing, whether she has been in service already. Mrs. Cartaret desires to see Mary Hind, in order to judge for herself. She is not easy to please. Her place is not an easy one. She will pay M. H.'s travelling expenses to Beckworth House (and back, should she not keep her), and give her a month's wages, at the rate of twenty pounds a year

for a few days' trial. Mrs. Cartaret allows no followers, nor any light conduct. She will have no flowers nor tails. Mary Hind will be under the housekeeper, whom she must obey and treat with respect. She must not quarrel with her fellow-servants, or give herself airs. Many maids have left on this account. Mary Hind had better start at once. Beckworth House is eight miles from Salisbury, and the train will drop her at the park-gate."

Perhaps Maud had hardly realised what her position was to be until she read this; for the colour mounted into her cheeks when she came to the "followers" and the "light conduct." . . . Well, never mind. The main thing was that she was to be tried; that a door was opened to her (though only ajar, as it were) by which she might escape, and no longer eat her stepmother's husband's bread, but earn it for herself. This was everything. "Thank God!" she said, almost aloud. "Farewell to fine-ladyism, and all the hollowness of a wretched life, without anything to do, and in dependence on a man I despise. Welcome honest servitude and hard work!" She liked decision and plain-speaking, qualities which certainly distinguished this letter, written to what

was believed to be a village girl, who had won golden opinions from the curate. There was nothing in it that ought to annoy her; but she began to see, for the first time clearly, what it was she was undertaking. She, who knew herself to be singularly impatient of control, was about to enter upon a life the first condition of which was implicit obedience. Mary's delinquency on that score crossed her mind, and all that Mr. Miles had said about it. And just as she had reached this point in her reflections, she heard behind her a long swinging step, and the very voice she was at that moment thinking of called out:—"I beg your pardon, Miss Pomeroy, but I think you have just dropped this letter."

She felt that she changed colour as she held out her hand for it, and she looked up into his face, in her quick, keen way, as if trying to read his thoughts.

"How did you know that it was mine? . . . as the . . . address . . ."

"I saw you drop it as I was leaving the school, but you walked at such a pace, Miss Pomeroy, I had some difficulty in catching you up without taking to running."

She hesitated for a moment. He had, of course,

seen the address, and she felt she must offer some explanation of this, or his suspicions might be aroused.

“I suppose you guessed whose initials these are?” she said, pointing to the address; but her manner, as Miles afterwards remembered, had not its usual directness: it was troubled, and she turned her eyes away from him as she spoke. “I have written to a lady about Mary Hind. I hope to get her a place, but . . . for many reasons . . . I desired this lady not to write to me . . . that is, at the house. Indeed, the letter *is* addressed to Mary herself.”

“I hope she will get the place, Miss Pomeroy. Have you sent my testimonial?”

“I have.”

“And do you know anything of the lady? What is her name?”

“I know nothing of her. She is a stranger,” replied Maud, rapidly, gliding over the other question. “If Mary gets the place, she will owe it entirely to you, Mr. Miles. . . . I hope she will be happy. . . . Do you think if people do their duty—in *any* state of life—they must be happy, Mr. Miles?”

He paused before answering her question. It

was the village gossip that she was to be married to Mr. Durborough, and he thought, with a pang, that her question had reference to this. At last he said, slowly :—" It depends upon whether the state of life is one to which we are called, or whether we choose it for ourselves, having our eyes open to the knowledge of good and evil. When Providence places us in a certain position, without our own free will having anything to do with it, I believe that the faithful discharge of duty does ensure a certain measure of happiness. When we deliberately leave that state of life for *another*——"

He broke off ; but, incomplete as the sentence was, its meaning was clear to Maud ; and, interpreting it as she did, its immediate application to her own case startled her so much that she looked into John Miles's face once more, with anxious scrutiny. His eyes were bent upon the ground, his lips trembled, and there was a slight contraction of the brow which told Maud that the man was suffering keenly. She could not see, indeed, all that was passing in his mind ; but something of it she guessed, and she felt sure that no suspicion of her resolve was there. Sir Andrew's sarcasm crossed her mind. Alas ! how

much better for her, perhaps, would it have been had she returned this faithful, upright man's love, and found a refuge by his cottage fire, instead of seeking it on the wide world ! It had fallen to her lot to meet with so little love in life, that she could not but feel gratitude and compassion, and a certain tender regretfulness, as she looked up at that honest red-nosed face, and thought that this might be the last time she should ever see it.

Perhaps the feminine desire that he should not think too ill of her when she had disappeared, no one could say whither, prompted her to say at last :—
“ Mr. Miles. I think I am going to leave Mortlands before long. The world will abuse me very much, but you are not of the world, and know something of what I have suffered here—something of what has led to determine me on taking this step. You will not be too harsh in your judgment, will you ? You have always been very kind, and have given me good advice, which, unfortunately, it was not in my nature to follow. Well, you will have one stubborn sheep the less in your fold ! But do not think I have been ungrateful. I wanted to tell you so before I go, and I may not have another opportunity : I shall never

forget your kindness to me as long as I live, Mr. Miles."

Poor John! It was with great difficulty that he managed to say calmly,—“Pardon me. Perhaps I have no right to ask it, but have you well weighed the solemn, irrevocable nature of the step you are about to take?”

Quick as lightning the truth of what he believed flashed upon her; but she dared not undeceive him. She could only reply, “I have.”

“Oh! Miss Pomeroy, before it is too late, pause, pause, I beseech you, and if ——”

“It is too late. My decision is made.”

“Then I can only say, God prosper you! and may He so order your life that you never have cause to regret it!”

“If a good man’s prayers avail anything, I know I have them,” said Maud, tremulously, for John Miles’s emotion, which he could not quite control, had infected her. “Good-by, Mr. Miles.”

They had reached the park-gate. He wrung her hand in silence, and passed into his cottage. And I believe, in the solitude of his own closet, where he sat with his face buried in his hands, motionless, for

an hour or more, that those prayers, the fervent outpourings of the young man's heart, rose, as Maud predicted that they would. And who shall say that they availed nothing in the end ?

The next morning, when Maud appeared neither at prayers, nor at the breakfast-table, Lady Herriesson desired that her own maid should go up to Miss Pomeroy's room, and see if she was unwell. Presently Lady Herriesson was called out of the breakfast-room, and found her maid looking rather pale. Miss Pomeroy's door was locked. The housemaid had left some hot water there at eight o'clock, according to Miss Pomeroy's general orders (for since Mary Hind's departure she would allow no one into her room until she was dressed), and there the jug still stood. They had knocked, and knocked, but there was no reply. Lady Herriesson, in much trepidation, now went up herself—but with no better results ; Sir Andrew followed, to see what was the matter, and found his wife in hysterics, and the farm-carpenter taking off the lock of the door. In a couple of minutes it swung back, and Sir Andrew walked into the room. It was empty. He glanced at the bed ; it had not been slept in. Upon the table

lay a letter directed to Lady Herriesson : he thrust it into his wife's hand, and stood over her while the poor lady, in her bewilderment and terror, read as follows :—

“DEAR MAMMA,—I am afraid you will be angry when you find that I have left Mortlands without telling you where I was going ; but, at all events, do not be alarmed about me, as I am quite safe. I am going to try and earn my bread : I can no longer be a burden upon Sir Andrew, and, having disappointed him and you as to this marriage, I feel doubly that it is my duty to try and provide for myself in some other way. Do not be the least uneasy about me : I am strong, and have plenty of courage, and having, I think, no false pride, prefer work to a life of inaction and dependence. Pray do not attempt to trace me ; it would do no good, even if you succeeded. You shall hear from me soon, when I hope to be able to tell you that I am happy—which I have not been for a long, long time. Accept my sincere thanks for all your kindness and care of me for eighteen years, and believe me to be

“ Yours affectionately, MAUD.”

It is needless to say that Lady Herriesson relapsed into hysterics on reading this, and Sir Andrew raged in a very terrible manner. Was there ever anything so monstrous, so utterly inconceivable as such conduct? That any one belonging to him should disgrace herself thus—should make herself the talk of the whole country-side, and run off in this shameful way, and then, to crown the enormity, proclaim that she was gone to earn her bread! Good God! such a thing as this he had never even heard of in the whole course of his experience! The girl, if caught, must be treated as a lunatic; and to shut her up would save her, perhaps, from a worse fate; for what could one expect such a creature, who set all laws, all authority at defiance, to come to?

Of course, messengers were sent in all directions to the nearest railway-stations, and all the neighbouring villages, but nothing could be heard of the missing young lady. The news reached John Miles, on the swift wing of rumour brought from the great house, very early in the day. 'Liza rushed in, heavily laden, and discharged the intelligence, much as she was wont to empty the coal-box upon the fire—full at him. And, strange to say, he was less horrified than

any one. He was grieved that she had taken such a step (he knew nothing of its object, of course); but he felt that even this, reprehensible as it was, was better than her emancipating herself from her detested life by marriage with a man like Mr. Durborough. He tried to assure himself that his own hopeless love had nothing to say to this sense of relief in finding that she had not consented to be another's; but that it was purely because that other was unworthy of her, and that, knowing Maud's character, he knew that had she so consented to perjure herself, she would have been an utterly miserable woman. At all events there was the thankfulness at his heart that she had not done this thing; and however the world—especially the world of Mortlands—might view the extraordinary step she had taken, it was only with sorrow he thought of it, as complicating the difficulties of her position with regard to Sir Andrew. He had very little doubt that she had gone to some friend in London, and would be heard of in the course of a day or two. And on the morning of the fifth day a letter did come; but so short, bald, and vague in its contents, that Lady Herriesson's disquietude could by no means be allayed. Maud wrote, indeed, that she

was well, and happy ; but that was all. There was no clue to where, or in what capacity, she was living. The post-mark on the letter was "Bristol." The police in that city were communicated with : they could obtain no clue to the mystery.

Sir Andrew would have inserted an advertisement in *The Times*, but for his dread of increasing the publicity of this disgraceful scandal. All attempts to hush up, or explain away, the young lady's disappearance were, of course, useless. It was very soon generally known ; but it was also known that no allusion was to be made to it before Sir Andrew. She was supposed to be "on a visit." And in this uncomfortable state matters remained for three weeks, during which John Miles's anxiety to learn what had really become of Maud, became naturally greater every day. It was then that a trifling incident occurred which aroused all the active energy of the man's nature ; for it seemed to him to have some possible bearing upon Miss Pomeroy's fate.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a still, mild night in February. There were a few stars, and but for them it was quite dark, when Maud unbolted the side door, and let herself out upon the terrace. It was then past two o'clock, and the household had been in bed at least an hour and a half. She had calculated that it would take her nearly two hours to walk into Scornton, where the train passed about four o'clock. There were two stations nearer to Mortlands, but at each of these the porters were familiar with her face, whereas at Scornton she was comparatively unknown. The darkest and shabbiest clothes she could find, and a double veil tied over her face, the little money she possessed in her purse, and an umbrella in her hand — thus was she equipped. She had to pass the gateway of the stable-yard, just inside which was Oscar's

kennel, and, at the sound of a footstep on the gravel, the dog began barking furiously. But she had only to call to him, and he was instantly silent, wagging his long shaggy tail in friendly recognition, as she approached him. "My poor Oscar—no! poor old boy, I am not come to unchain you. You and I shall take no more walks together, no more solitary rambles over happy hunting-grounds. Good-by, dear old dog, who have been such a faithful friend and companion to me; no one will miss me here but you." She stooped down and kissed his rough grey head, and it seemed almost as though Oscar understood her meaning. He placed his two paws upon her shoulders, and whined. Maud felt more in parting from her dog, I believe, than in parting from her stepmother.

She was an excellent walker; the night was fine, the road was good, and she was not troubled with nervousness. Twice when she heard the hob-nailed tread of countrymen upon the road, she thought it as well to stand aside under the shadow of the hedge till they were passed; but she had small fear of being molested; her only fear was that of being recognised. At the station, she had a quarter of an

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hour, which seemed like three, to wait for the train. In the waiting-room there was a poor woman with a baby, and a bag-man with a black leather case, which he never let out of his hand; and both were so occupied with their separate charges, that they scarcely looked at the quiet woman in the corner, with an impenetrable veil on. She waited to take her ticket till the train was actually alongside the platform: she then stepped, unobserved, into an empty second-class compartment, and felt that she was safe.

It was so early when she reached Salisbury that none of the shops were open; and the train for Beckworth did not leave till ten o'clock. She had a cup of coffee and a crust of bread, and then, acting upon the plan she had arranged, she set out to wander about the quaint old town, until she could see the shutters being taken down from some "slop shop," or ready-made clothes warehouse, where she might procure what she required. She threaded the still silent streets, lit by the pale light of the winter daybreak, until she came to the Close, and found herself standing before that perfect old building, the cathedral. Presently a decrepit old man made his

way across the green, and unlocked a side-door. There was to be an early service, and he was come to put all in order: Maud followed him. Hers was not what may be called a religious temperament. She had not found, perhaps she had not looked for, much comfort in church services; and when she bent her knees each morning, it was to confess, indeed, that she was unworthy of the least of all God's gifts, but not that she sought for strength to meet the trials of the day. Those trials were not of a kind that most readily lead such natures to look for help beyond this world. Devastating sorrows, great shocks of fortune, and the like, may bring even the proudest and least dependent souls to turn their eyes to "the hills whence cometh our salvation:" but the irritations of daily life rarely kindle a great faith.

She had decided, in her impetuous way, that this strange and hazardous enterprise was a right thing for her to undertake; and, having so decided, she had acted without doubt or misgiving as to her own conduct. But the feverish excitement under which she had been living for the last few days had now somewhat abated; for the first decisive step from which there was no drawing back was taken; and

now after her night's journey as she slowly paced the sacred aisle, from which the shadows were being driven in the strengthening daylight, the reaction began: a sense of her own solitude, of her utter friendlessness in the world upon which she had chosen to cast herself, came over her like a great wave. Surely she had done well? Was not independence the noblest state after which any of God's creatures could strive? And, on the other hand, was it not a vile thing for any human being, capable of earning her own bread, to live upon the charity of one whom she despised, and who did not conceal his desire to be rid of the incumbrance? Surely it was true that God helps those who help themselves? And then some desire to ask that help came upon her, and, half-unconsciously, she slid down upon her knees beside a pillar, and prayed as she had never done before.

"Come, mum, you must be a-movin' on. No prayers allowed 'ere, in the nave. Reg'lar prayers, if you wants 'em, at mornin' service, in a quarter of a hour."

Maud started to her feet, and with a look of indignation at the doorkeeper of the House of God,

walked quickly away. But those few minutes left their mark upon her throughout that day.

After wandering about the streets for some time, she came to a shop which provided all that she required. Her black silk she exchanged for a grey alpaca ; her bonnet for one which had no remnant of young-ladyhood about it ; and a carpet-bag, full of such articles as were absolutely necessary, but all of the plainest and coarsest description, was hoisted upon the back of a boy, and carried for her to the station.

Maud got into an empty second-class ; but this time she was not to be alone : just as the train was starting, a florid patent-polished man of forty, or thereabout, bustled into the carriage, with two large hampers, and took his seat upon the bench opposite Maud, but not directly in front of her, by reason of her carpet-bag, which, being on the floor beside her, formed a barricade. The man, no doubt, in his own class of life, was reckoned eminently well-looking. There was a good-humoured smirking self-satisfaction in his face which told of bodily comfort, mental ease, and general social success. The glossy blackness of his whiskers, which depended low over his waistcoat,

the oily undulations of his hair, the beady blackness of his eyes, resembled a portrait done on glazed card-board with a B B pencil. By the time it had reached the nose and mouth the point of the pencil had become somewhat coarse and blunted. But the artist had been eminently successful in the clothes. How beautifully black and smooth they were! What attention he had paid to that satin stock, transfixed with two pins connected by a chain, to the glittering watch-guard and seals, to the cornelian ring upon the finger! How one felt that, if exhibited in a shop window, and ticketed, "In this style, seven and sixpence," the admiration of a discerning public would lead them to go and be "done" likewise!.

Maud did not take in all these details at a glance, and it was no more than a glance she gave to her fellow-traveller; then she turned her head, and looked resolutely out of window. But the train was scarcely in motion when he began, with an oily briskness of voice and manner:—"Fine morning for the time of year, miss?"

"Yes."

"Going far on the rail? What station?"

"Beckworth."

“Really? Indeed! That’s curious now. I don’t know your face. You’re a stranger in these parts, eh?”

“Yes, I am,” said Maud, shortly: she did not fancy this interrogatory, and looked out of window again.

“I know most of the faces about Beckworth.” A pause: then, seeing that this drew forth no reply, he added, with a captivating smile, “And yours is too ’andsome a one to be forgot.”

She turned round, and looked at him steadily, without a word. Nothing daunted, he continued, with a laugh: “No offence, I ’ope. It ain’t the first time you’ve been told so, I’m sure. Going out to service, eh?”

This time Maud only nodded her head—and it was half out of window. How she wished her short journey at an end! The man’s familiarity was very offensive, and she made up her mind that she would answer no more of his questions.

“Who are you going to? Squire Barnby, or the Rectory? Both close to us—can tell you all about ’em.” Still no reply.

A full minute’s pause. Then the same melli-

fluous accents: "No cause to cut up rusty, my dear, because I called you 'andsome. We shall be neighbours, and may as well make friends—eh? Allow me to offer you a orange?"

He plunged his hand into one of the hampers and produced the fruit, which he held out with the seductive air of a Satan tempting Eve. She thanked him, dryly, and shook her head, without looking at him.

"In the kitchen, or the nursery, is it?" he pursued. "I 'ope it ain't at the Rectory, that's all—they're regularly starved there, and such a fuss about broken victuals! every crust and scrap used up, they tell me. Such mean ways wouldn't suit *me*, nor you, neither, I should say? You look as if you'd bin used to good food, and plenty of it: ha, ha!"

Finding, at last, that he could get neither a word nor a smile from his fair travelling companion, he made up his mind that she was, as he afterwards expressed it, "half-savage, and no ways used to good society; a fine gal, sir, very fine, but *not* genteel; scowls at a compliment, and snaps off your nose if you ask her a civil question." And so he left her in peace.

And now the porters called out "Beckworth:"

the man and his hampers bustled out; there were greetings of a semi-respectful, semi-familiar kind, offered to him by more than one person on the platform; the guard blew his whistle, the train moved off, and Maud found herself standing alone, unheeded, with her bag beside her, both porters being in attendance upon the hampers and their owner. She walked up to a little man with his hands in his pockets, whom she had seen talking with her fellow-traveller a moment before, and whom she rightly guessed was the station-master.

“In which direction is Beckworth House? Can I get any one to carry my bag?”

“Is it the big house you want? Mrs. Cartaret’s? Why there’s Mr. Dapper just going up in the dogcart.”

“Who is Mr. Dapper? Not that man——”

“There, with the hampers, at the gate. He’s Mrs. Cartaret’s butler. Hello! Jem, you tell Mr. Dapper that this here young woman and her bag is going up to the house.”

It was a disagreeable little coincidence: Maud would have given a great deal not to perform that mile in the dogcart alongside a man against whom

she felt such a repulsion; but there was no help for it. What excuse could she give for avoiding so obvious a mode of transit? And would it not be the height of folly to enter upon her new career by what might reasonably be said to be "giving herself airs?" Mr. Dapper and his hampers were already in the cart when she reached the gate. He looked at her with an amused smile.

"So we're not to part so soon after all? Ha! ha! You're the new maid, I s'pose, that Mrs. C. has been advertising for? Stupid of me not to have guessed it, only I didn't know the right article 'ad been found yet. There, settle yourself comfortable—wrap my plaid round you. Now, Tom, all right, let go her head; the bag's in, ain't it? Off we go; good-by, Mr. Tuckett. Well, to be sure! only to think of our travelling together, and you never telling me you was coming to our 'ouse! 'ere's the lodge-gate—easy, mare, easy! Don't bolt now, you'll get back to your stable fast enough. There's the Rectory, out there in the trees, d'ye see? That's where I made sure you was going; but I'm glad it's us that is to have the good fortune——" He concluded his sentence with an insinuating smile, and an expressive

flourish of his whip, which excited the mare more than he intended. But it was clear that Mr. Dapper was accustomed to handle the ribbons, and he rose just one degree above the freezing point of Maud's esteem, as she saw how skilfully he managed the hot-tempered mare, who would have fairly run away with a less expert driver.

"And now, you know *my* name—what's yours?" he asked.

"Hind."

"Oh; Miss 'ind? Well, you see, I wasn't so far wrong in calling you a *dear*—Ha! ha! excuse me—no offence. It's only my way—you'll get accustomed to me in time I 'ope. . . . It's curious, now my going into Salisbury this morning, I who don't go, not once in six months. But fish and things was wanted in a 'urry, for company come unexpected—some of Mr. Lowndes's friends—and no time to get 'em from London: so Mrs. Cartaret and me arranged last night that I was to go in by the first train—which I'm not fond of getting up quite so *early*, to tell you the truth—ha! ha!"

"Who is Mr. Lowndes?" asked Maud, for the sake of saying something.

“ Mrs. Cartaret’s only son—Mr. Lowndes Cartaret—a fine, wild young gentleman—runs down ’ere promiscuous, bringing company with ’im, without ever writing a word before ’and—just like ’em! . . . but *she* don’t mind, bless you! *She* wouldn’t mind if he was to bring the ’ole ’orse guards down with him—though she’s a queer woman, and ’as her tantrums, betimes . . . ’Im and ’er ’as fine blows up now and then, but she just worships ’im, and lets ’im do mostly what ’e likes—and ’e knows all ’er little fads, and ’ow to manage ’er. She’s ’alf French, you see, and foreigners ’ave queer ways. I’ll put you up to a wrinkle, Miss ’ind. Don’t you give way to ’er in everything, or you won’t be able to call your life your own. You try and get round Mrs. Rouse. *That’s* the woman. She’s awful jealous of the new maids at fust. Don’t you let butter melt in your mouth when you’re talking to ’er. But you stick up to Mrs. Cartaret. She likes to believe that she orders everything—but, Lor’ bless you, she’d never get on without a little ’olesome contradiction. ‘Dapper,’ says she to me last night, ‘we’ll ’ave that white Dresden service at dinner,’ says she. I bow, and say nothing, and put on the old Indian. ‘Dapper, ’ow’s

this?' says she; 'I told you the white Dresden.' So then I says, says I, 'Begging your pardon, ma'am, I found the white looked too cold for the season. Does very well in the summer, ma'am; but with your good taste you wouldn't 'ave liked it now—you wouldn't, indeed.' That's 'ow I manage 'er, Miss 'ind. 'Ave an opinion of your own. Now to Mrs. Rouse, on the contrary, you must knock under in everything. That's why she sends all the maids packing—they don't knock under enough, Miss 'ind. There's bin ever so many of 'em in my time, and none of 'em stay six months."

This was not very reassuring; but the man's impudence made Maud attach but little weight to his words; and if it was true that "having opinions of one's own" was so essential in any relations with Mrs. Cartaret, certainly Maud felt herself to be eminently fitted, in this respect, for the position. The prospect, however, of having to live in close association with the propounder of these theories, whose vulgar familiarity made the girl's blood tingle, was so distasteful to her that it seriously crossed her mind whether she should ask to be put down in the park, and make her way back to the station, with her

bag. But she felt it would be weak to be thus turned aside from her purpose at the very outset. After all, anything could be borne for a day; and her ordeal might last no longer: Mrs. Cartaret would probably find her wanting, or if she did not, assuredly Mrs. Rouse would, and dismiss her even more summarily than her predecessors.

The park was quite flat, with little trees, like children's toys, stuck about it; and just as Mr. Dapper ceased speaking, a turn in the carriage-drive brought them within sight of a party of sportsmen, with gamekeepers, dogs and beaters, approaching from the house.

"That's Mr. Lowndes," said Dapper, "and Lord Kenchester, and Mr. Robert Marbury." Maud could just see that there were three young men: one tall, in a Norfolk blouse, with leather gaiters, and one very short and fair; as the dogcart whisked round the corner to the right towards the stables, the mare, in her impetuosity, nearly capsizing them; and the shrubbery hid the sportsmen from her sight. She was thankful for it. It would have been intolerable to her to run the gauntlet of these young men's observations on her first arrival, seated on a dog beside the seductive Mr. Dapper.

CHAPTER V.

MAUD alighted in a wide courtyard, having the stables on one side, a wing of the house in which were the offices opposite, and some kennels with a poultry-yard on the third side facing the gateway through which they drove. It was upon a much smaller scale than anything at Mortlands, but far more cheerful. There was a crowing of cocks, and cackling of hens, and the barking of innumerable dogs, all which sounds were kept decently out of ear-shot at Sir Andrew's. A groom was washing a pony-carriage, and another was cleaning his bits, and both were whistling merrily at their work. Maud had never heard any one whistle at Mortlands. It was puerile, but this little circumstance revived her spirits.

"Take care and rub that mare well down," said Mr. Dapper. "She's very 'ot—'ard work to 'old 'er

in, she was that fidgety. Now, miss, if *you* please—this way. This is the 'ousekeeper's room, where we retire after meals to wine and dessert (no second table, I am sorry to tell you). Mrs. Rouse! she's upstairs—never mind—you take that chair by the fire, and make yourself comfortable, and—stay——” He unlocked a cupboard, and took from it a decanter of sherry. “Thomas, you bring in a tray with the cold beef and chutney sauce, and——”

“Thank you, but I want nothing; I am not hungry. Only if you would let Mrs. Cartaret know as soon as possible that I am here.”

“Oh! there's no 'urry about that, but I'll tell Mrs. Rouse. She'll come to you directly.”

“But it is Mrs. Cartaret I want to see, not Mrs. Rouse.”

“I think it'll be better to see Mrs. Rouse first,” and Mr. Dapper winked in a knowing manner, as he left the room.

Presently the housekeeper entered. She was a large, but very active woman of about fifty, with a red face, and chinchilla-coloured hair; clearly accustomed to rule, and that with an iron hand; not an ill-tempered face, but a choleric one, impatient of

contradiction, and intolerant of any interference in her own domain. She eyed Maud suspiciously from head to foot; then she said, somewhat sharply:—
“So you’re the young woman as is come after the place of second lady’s maid? and has never been in service before, eh? Well, it’s right as you should know what you’ve got to look to here. I am Mrs. Cartaret’s maid, as well as housekeeper, and the second maid is under me, as has got to do every blessed thing as I tell her, without asking questions. D’ye understand that? Very well. Then, mind this now: I don’t allow no skylarking with the men; they’ll be all talking a pack of nonsense to you, because you’re a fine-grown young woman; but if you want that sort of fun, as is likely enough, you’d better pack and be off, because——”

Maud rose, with a heightened colour, and faced Mrs. Rouse.

“Ma’am, I had better be off at once. I have not been used to be suspected, and I think you might have waited till you saw something in my conduct to justify your suspicions, before speaking in this way.” She moved towards the door. “You will be good enough to tell Mrs. Cartaret——”

Mrs. Rouse laid no gentle hand upon her wrist.

“Don’t be a fool, but sit down there, and listen to me. What are you crying out for, afore you’re hurt? Who’s accusing you? It’s only a wholesome warning, as you mayn’t run again’ a stone wall with your eyes shut. There’s a lot of men in this house, and some on ’em wildish, beginning with—— Well, never mind, but you look here: don’t let any on ’em get familiar with you, that’s all. There’s Mr. Dapper, now, you treat him respectful, as is his doo, but don’t you let him be *familiar*.”

“I am not likely,” said Maud, with ineffable disdain.

“Hoighty-toighty! That’s your style, is it? But let me tell you I don’t approve of no *airs*, neither, young woman. Servants can keep theirselves respectable without that. And them as carry theirselves too high can’t always see where they’re walking, and tumble, maybe: I’ve known it afore now. You ain’t given to sauce, I hope? Because, if there’s that thing I can’t stand, it’s sauce. The last gurl as went away o’ Toosday week ’d never let you have the last word, if you tried ever so. *She* wasn’t here long. Now, you come up with me to Mrs. Cartaret.”

And, with that, she opened the door wide, and marched on ahead, down a long passage, and up a back staircase, and again along a passage, till she came to a door, which she opened, without knocking.

“Here is the young woman, ma’am—shall she come in?”

“Yes, my good Rouse, by all means,” replied a high voice, with a strong French accent, which sounded as if it came from under a feather-bed.

Maud entered, and found herself in a spacious room, across one-half of which a leathern screen was drawn. Beyond this stood a vast four-post bed, and in this bed lay Mrs. Cartaret, having her breakfast, propped by pillows, and surrounded with books, newspapers, and letters, some upon the floor, some upon a table near the bed, some upon the bed itself. The same “admired confusion” reigned throughout the apartment, all the tables and drawers being piled with bills and papers, photographs, miniature-cases, and boxes of all sizes and materials, from the leather despatch-box and jewel-case down to the carton of ribands, among which Mrs. Rouse, no doubt, vainly did her best to introduce some order. An engraving of Marie Antoinette, in hoop and towering head-gear,

hung over the mantelpiece, and opposite the bed : another of the same unhappy queen, taken at the Conciergerie, in the attire of a *citoyenne* of the Republic, all the pride and power of the face crushed out of it, and in its place a saintly dignity, was a little further on. A heavy-faced woman with a row of rigid curls and a turban, and a fat young man with a Bourbon physiognomy, were respectively labelled, in Mrs. Cartaret's hand, *Son Altesse Royale, La Duchesse d'Angoulême*, and *Sa Majesté, Henri Cinq, Roi de France*. Various other French ladies and gentlemen graced the walls, among whom the deceased Cartaret, in the dress of an English country gentleman, looked rather out of place : as did also a very modern-looking boy of sixteen upon a pony, done in water-colours by a travelling artist some eight years since, and esteemed a very choice work of art.

The owner of these miscellaneous treasures appeared to be a woman of sixty-five, inclining to stoutness, and, as far as Maud could judge, below the middle height. A black eye of extraordinary vivacity, a clear dark skin, grey hair tossed back from her face, and bright even teeth, which showed

much when she spoke—these were the salient points a stranger would seize in describing her appearance. If a man sensitive to impressions, he would probably go on to say that the features, though not regular, possessed the charm of great mobility; that the youthfulness of this old face, the way in which kindled with enthusiasm, softened and clouded over, with sorrow, or flushed with scorn and anger, was its chief attraction, and made it an object of interest when younger and more perfect faces were coldly admired and forgotten.

This, at least, it was not easy to do; Mrs. Cartaret was not a woman to forget. Everything about her betrayed her foreign extraction: the inflections of her voice, the movement of her hands, the tasteful arrangement of her old French dress. She spoke tolerably idiomatic English (though always with an accent), except at times, when she was excited; and then, in the heat of the moment, she would always break out into some Gallicism, or literal translation of the French thought which flamed uppermost in her mind. Her angers were very hot and strong, her prejudices insurmountable; her vanity of a certain kind was great, and her belief in her paramount

opinion and authority unshaken by those two astute viceroys, who, in their own departments, ruled absolutely as they liked—always keeping up the farce of implicit deference to the queen-regnant.

“ Well, Mary Hind, come and let me look at you,” she began, as Maud stood at a certain distance, gazing in wonderment at the disordered room and its occupant. “ Draw nearer—well! you received my letter, and you are come. H’m! I wonder whether you will suit me? You’re too good-looking, eh, Rouse? That’s a drawback, h’m! Pray, how old are you?”

“ Two-and-twenty, ma’am.”

“ And never been out to service yet! How comes that?”

Maud did not know how to reply to this question. Fortunately Mrs. Cartaret, as was her wont when she was impatient, suggested an answer herself.

“ Got sick of your life at home? And the curate gave you a certificate to get you a situation, I suppose? Hein?”

“ Yes, ma’am, that is it.”

“ Well—I don’t know what to say—hem! an inexperienced girl—it is a trial, look you. Mine

is a hard place; I warn you of that. Got good lungs, eh?"

"I believe so, ma'am."

"Hold out your hand—*Dieu de Dieu!* Why, it doesn't look as if you had ever done a day's work. You're not a fine lady, eh?"

"No, ma'am. I want to work. That is why I go to service. I had too little to do at home."

"Good; and you can read? Aloud, I mean—you have been taught that at school?"

"Yes, ma'am, and French too, though perhaps not very well."

"*Mon Dieu!* you read French? This is unexpected. Here, sit down; take that, and read me a page."

Maud did as she was bidden. It was a volume of the *Grand Cyrus* of Mademoiselle de Scudéry; and Maud accomplished her task, threading the flowery involutions of the courtly old French more deftly than many English-bred young ladies could have done.

"Rouse!" cried Mrs. Cartaret, clapping her hands, "she's a treasure. Don't be jealous, my good creature, but she'll be worth her weight in gold

to me. My eyes, you see, Mary Hind, for all that they are still bright, are very little use to me. I cannot read long ; and no one here reads French—even my own son doesn't like it, hélas ! Is Mr. Lowndes gone out shooting, Rouse ? Well, there is no use, then, in my getting up yet awhile. Take the girl to her room, and then let her come back to me. I will have a chapter of that beautiful book before I leave my bed—I will."

Mrs. Rouse, judging from the expression of her face, was not too well-pleased at the discovery of this unlooked-for accomplishment in her new assistant ; but she took Maude to her room, and gave her some instructions as to her duties, and the hours of the household meals. And while she is thus employed, we may as well take the opportunity of giving a brief sketch of Mrs. Cartaret's family history, the circumstances of which Maud only learnt by degrees, but which, if here stated, will render it easier to understand the many antagonistic elements into which the girl now found herself suddenly cast.

Mrs. Cartaret's father was an English officer, and a *détenu* during the war with France in the early years of this century. During his obligatory resi-

dence in France he married Mademoiselle de B——, a woman of high rank, no longer very young, whose early girlhood had been passed at Louis XVI.'s court, where her father held a high post, and who had been reduced to great poverty by the confiscation of the family estates. Her father had died in exile: then the daughter had returned to France, and had gone to live with an old cousin at Bordeaux, where she met and fascinated Captain Dallas. The fruit of this union was one child, the old lady with whom this story has now to do. Born in France, she came over to England with her parents at the peace, and remained here until her father's death a few years later. But the language she first spoke was her mother's; all her tastes and sympathies were French, or, more properly speaking, Bourbon; and in spite of the Dallas blood in her veins, she never spoke or thought of herself as an Englishwoman. She had inherited her mother's passionate attachment to the unhappy house whose misfortunes she had shared. At the Restoration, she had gone over with her mother to greet Louis XVIII. (Captain Dallas was now dead), and had returned to these shores indignant after the Revolution of 1830.

Shortly after this it was that she met Mr. Cartaret, a plain English country squire, who had no foreign predilections, no enthusiasms, no very strong convictions of any sort, I believe, but who became enamoured of Miss Dallas's bright eyes, and laid himself and his handsome fortune at her feet. They were admirably suited to each other: she would not have been happy with any man who had not let her have her own way, and Mr. Cartaret indulged her every whim and fancy. The sayings and doings of the little lady often sorely tried her sober husband, but his temper was excellent, and it is a question whether the blameless ways of more discreet matrons would have had the charm for him that the changing humours of his impulsive little wife possessed. She failed to inspire him with any ardour in the cause of Legitimacy; she could not get him to join her in vituperation of the house of Orleans—that race of “ingrats”—as long as it was in power, nor, when it had been ousted, to wage war against the second Empire, and express a desire to poison all the canaille who now desecrated the holy places of the Tuileries. He had not plotted and intrigued for “Henri Cinq,” nor had he visited Frohsdorf, but he had allowed his

wife to do these things; he had been very tolerant of the visits of melancholy foreigners in straitened circumstances, with the politest manners and the slenderest stock of English at their command; he had even given his wife money for all sorts of purposes, which, when he was not ignorant of them, he mildly disapproved: and for acting thus, during his lifetime, Mrs. Cartaret was certainly bound to lament him at his death, as the best and most indulgent of husbands, which she duly did. To her was bequeathed for her lifetime, absolutely and entirely, the whole of the property; Lowndes, the only son of this strangely-assorted couple, being dependent on his mother, with the exception of a small estate which had been devised to him by an uncle. Mr. Cartaret's will caused great animadversion. That so flighty and passionate a woman should be left with unlimited power to do as she liked, during her life, with her son's natural inheritance, was looked upon as a lamentable instance of uxorious folly. She could not alienate it, it is true, but might she not administer the property in a manner most prejudicial to her son's interests? Nay, who could tell but that she might cut down half the trees to subsidise troops

for another French Revolution? The event proved that Mr. Cartaret knew his wife better than the world did; that its estimate, in this case, as in many others, was founded upon a one-sided view of the truth. In the first place, the web of her mental extravagance, on many points, was crossed by a woof of shrewdness and worldly knowledge which those who saw how she was indulged by her husband and ruled by her servants failed to perceive. Then all her convictions, all her hallucinations upon certain subjects, were independent of her principles in the conduct of every-day life, which, in the main, were sensible enough, as we shall see. Lastly, there was her paramount and intense devotion to her son, a devotion not always wise, perhaps; short-sighted, passionate, ill-restrained; but one which made her ready at any moment to sacrifice her own interests, her own peace, every consideration under the sun, to the furtherance of his welfare. She had been and still was a conscientious steward of the property committed to her charge. Lowndes, who was now five-and-twenty, would long since have made "ducks and drakes" of it. It was a perception of the boy's tendencies—he was sixteen when Mr. Cartaret died—

which had no doubt led the father to make the will he did. His son was at that time at Eton, a pleasure-loving, impudent boy, with capital natural abilities, and no application or ambition ; but very popular, and utterly reckless of money. As it had been in the green tree, so was it now in the dry. Oxford had not improved him : he had launched out into the wildest dissipation, and had come home upwards of two thousand pounds in debt. Then had Mrs. Cartaret wept and raved, and gnashed her teeth, and one of those violent "scenes" which were of periodical occurrence between mother and son took place. Lowndes used to declare that they were as necessary to Mrs. Cartaret's well-being, from time to time, as are the storms which clear the atmosphere too heavily charged with electricity.

Lowndes Cartaret was to be in diplomacy ; he was to be in the Guards ; to have a clerkship in the Treasury, and be private secretary to a cousin of his father's who was in the cabinet ; but he followed none of these lines, preferring to lead an utterly profitless existence, without one serious aim or interest in life. He would one day have eight thousand a year : he had now twelve hundred of his own ;

it enabled him to keep a lodging in St. James's Street, and as many hunters (at his mother's expense) as he chose; to go to Scotland for grouse-shooting, and to Paris at least twice a year; to have his stall at the Opera, and to spend considerable sums in other ways, which it is not necessary here to particularise—and what could a man want more? He had no ambition to become a general, or an ambassador, or even a minister of state; what was the use of tying a log to his feet, and becoming any man's slave? He had few convictions, and absolutely no veneration; and was as aggravating a young man, with his insolent scoffing manner of treating other people's beliefs and prejudices, as it was easy to find. No one had ever obtained any abiding influence over him. He was extremely fond of his mother—in his own way; but, like the servants, he very early learnt how to “manage” her, and he did not scruple to laugh at her, to her very face, having no more respect for her opinions than he had for anybody else's. She had vainly endeavoured to inflame his young mind with a due ardour in the cause of Legitimacy; she had laboured, but without result, to inspire him with a taste for Madame de

Sévigné's courtly graces of style, and Racine's polished classicalities; but Lowndes yawned over everything but Molière. The boy was thoroughly English, and as the boy was so the man became. He had been taken to Frohsdorf; he had received a gold watch from the hands of the gentleman who, his mother tried to impress upon him, was the real King of France; but he remained perfectly indifferent as to who sat upon that throne. He used to say, "If my mother should go mad, she will fancy herself one of Louis the Fourteenth's mistresses." The good lady of whom this impudent speech was made associated very little with the county; their ways, and thoughts, and interests were not hers; she was glad that her son should go to all the great houses; and she received with avidity any favourable report of the impression he produced there; but she herself kept aloof from such society. She seldom went to London, unless it was on her way to the Continent; and now that Paris was in the hands of "that upstart," she declared it made her sick to go there, and see the beautiful old city being converted into a bad edition of New York. She had corresponded with the Duchesse d'Angoulême as long as the royal lady was

alive, and still did so with certain old Legitimists of "the Faubourg." Occasionally a few withered men of extraordinarily polished manners, and speaking a purer and more measured language than is ever heard in the France of to-day, came over to pass a few weeks at Beckworth. These, with the exception of Lowndes's friends, who came for shooting or hunting, at all sorts of unexpected times, were the only guests they ever saw. The descents he sometimes made with two or three men—as at this moment—without forewarning, were, indeed, strongly objected to by Mrs. Rouse and Mr. Dapper; but Mrs. Cartaret was never disturbed by these sudden irruptions.

"There's no fish, nor no ice, nor nothing!" said Mrs. Rouse, in a high querulous key, the evening before our introduction to the establishment—"and Mr. Lowndes bin and brought two gentlemen down from London!"

"Nor so much as an orange, by way of fruit," said Mr. Dapper, plaintively.

"Never mind, Dapper, they must do without," cried Mrs. Cartaret. "There's enough for them to eat, isn't there? And plenty of claret in the cellar?"

What would the men have? They come à l'improviste. They must take what they can get, and if they don't like it, let them go walk!"

It ended, however, as usual, in the two ministers of state carrying the day, and in that early visit of Mr. Dapper's to Salisbury on the following morning, of which record has been already made.

CHAPTER VI.

MAUD entered Mrs. Cartaret's room again, an hour later. That lady cried out, on seeing her: "Here, Mary, come and draw a chair close to the bed, and go on at the place you left off. Stay, though—you shall first answer this rascally letter for me. There is pen and ink."

"I can't write with that, ma'am. It has got no nib."

"Mon Dieu! It does well enough for me. Did they give you nibs at your school? How they do spoil the children now-a-days! Here, then, is a steel one, now—write quick. Do not be an hour over it. You spell correct, do you? Here is a bit of paper."

"It is only half a sheet, ma'am, and it has a blot."

"Juste Ciel! Who taught you to be so par-

ticular? The blot will not blind the man, will it? and he can read what I have to say on half a sheet as well as a whole one. Go on—‘Sir, I have many impertinent applications from you. One answer for all—my son’s debts contract when——’

“Contracted?” suggested Maud.

“Well, yes, contracted—ah! you are grammatical, are you?—‘when he was at college, were paid by me when he came of age. He entirely denies the justice of your claim. I have no more to do with his bills. He has his own fortune, and I desire no more vile letters——’”

“Vile? Is not that rather strong, ma’am?”

“No, no, write it—I wish to be strong—‘vile letters may be addressed to me on the subject.’ Here, give me the pen, and I sign it—mon Dieu! Petite—what a good hand you write. Now, then, that is done. Here is the book, and here is where you left off. ‘Artamène regarda le Roy d’Assirie avec une douleur inconcevable, et le Roy d’Assirie regarda Artamène avec un désespoir que l’on ne sauroit exprimer.’ Ah! que c’est beau! que c’est touchant! Do you know who the Grand Cyrus was, child?”

“ He was the King of Persia, wasn't he, ma'am ? ”

“ No, no, he was the great Condé ; the most brave, the most charming prince of his time, and Mandane was the Duchesse de Longueville, his sister. Did they teach you French history at your school, eh ? ”

“ I have learnt a little of it, ma'am. I know that the great Condé was the hero of Rocroi.”

“ Tiens ! Tiens ! So you know that, do you ? Well, then, this is all an allegory, you see. All the fine company, all the wit and intellect of the time that used to meet at the Hôtel Rambouillet, is here depicted. Ah ! what nobility ! what purity of sentiment ! what a style ! ”

“ Is it not rather lengthy, ma'am ? ”

“ Lengthy ? bah ! not a bit ! In the Grand Monarque's time, look you, people were not in such a hurry to bolt a book. They have no time to taste it now, but gulp it down, like a pill ! Bah ! Everything is decayed together ; religion, literature, art : it is all gone—all ! ”

Maud began reading, and she read for some time ; but, in spite of her best efforts, she found her thoughts wander from the lofty and long-winded

conversations of Cyrus and Mandane to subjects of strong personal interest: her own position in the house, and the strange character of the old lady whom she had undertaken to serve. She read with her eyes and with her voice, but not with her mind; and Mrs. Cartaret stopped her at last with an impatient exclamation:

“There! that will do, shut up the book. You have never been in love yet, eh, Mary Hind, or you could not read that touching passage like a frog—so cold. Now, get me my bath. Ah! but that miserable creature, Jane, has let out the fire!”

She clutched at the bell-rope, tore at it, hung on it, with an energy which brought the blood into her face, and which Maud expected would rouse the entire household. But some minutes elapsed before Jane answered the summons, in no way discomposed by its violence, and regarding it apparently as a matter of course.

“Why do you not bring coal here, you wretched do-nothing?” screamed Mrs. Cartaret, beating her little fat hands upon the bed. “Am I to be left to die of cold, with ten servants in the house? How often do I tell you to come and look at the fire once

in the hour? Hé? Thought the new maid was with me? Well, and if she was, she can't make coal, I suppose? Hold your tongue, you lazy wretch, you are only good to eat—eat—eat—all day long. Come, don't stand staring there at me, but away with you, and fetch the wood. Now, Mary Hind, there is your dinner-bell. Go along. I shall not get up till you come back;" and she flounced down again among her pillows, secretly by no means sorry of the excuse for indulging in another half-hour of her beloved bed.

Leaving the inflammable little lady as she was desired, Maud descended with some hesitation, it must be confessed, to the servants' hall. It was her first really severe ordeal, but she would not flinch from it. Her place was to the left of Mr. Dapper; on his right, and presiding over the board, glared Mrs. Rouse. The eye of suspicion which the formidable housekeeper directed towards Maud was far from reassuring; but if Dapper would only have regarded her in like manner she would have been glad. His amenities, his jokes, his delicate attentions, in the way of tit-bits, and a constantly replenished tumbler, were peculiarly offensive; all the more so, that she

saw how they aggravated Mrs. Rouse's hostility. It was in vain that Maud repelled the fascinating butler's advances ; he was one of those men who are never discouraged ; and, as all his good stories and smart sayings were received with rounds of applause and laughter by the appreciative audience "below the salt," she only succeeded in producing an effect of extreme churlishness and ungeniality upon the table at large. She was aware of this, but how could it be otherwise ? She felt ill at ease, and out of place ; and yet she repeated over and over again to herself that she had no false pride, though she heard Jane confide to the kitchen-maid that the new maid was evidently "a awful stuck-up thing." They all seemed to get on very well together, and dealt chiefly in jokes and allusions which were incomprehensible to Maud ; showing in this respect a national similitude to the highest circles of our society, whose language is not understood out of their own set. Mrs. Rouse was treated with becoming deference, and Mrs. Rouse did not unbend much in laughter, like the younger members of the establishment. Perhaps, because she was vigilantly watching Maud, and was undoubtedly desirous of inspiring her with a wholesome awe ; for

it was clear that she could, and did, enjoy the lively Dapper's sallies at a more convenient season; and that, while maintaining her authority, she was by no means unpopular with the servants under her.

“But there's a time for everything, Mr. Dapper,” as she observed to her colleague, that afternoon, “and I'm not rightly easy in my mind about that new young woman. She's a puzzle to me, Mr. Dapper, and I don't like puzzles, I likes plain sailing; and I'm going to watch her pretty sharp, that's what I'm going to do. So you look out now, and don't be playin' the fool as you done with that——”

“Lor'! Mrs. Rouse, 'ow you do rake up old scores, to be sure! And there was nothing in it, after all, to make such a fuss about. It was only, as one may say, a pass-tong; no 'arm, I'm sure.”

“I don't know what a pass-tong is, Mr. Dapper; but I know I packed off the jade in double-quick time, and I'll do the same by this one, if I find she's up to any of her tricks, and so I tell ye. She looks mighty prim, but I always mistrust them mealy-mouthed ones; and she's got a devil in her eye, if I don't mistake. The missis is fairly taken with her parlez-vousing. Well! we shall see!”

And with this ominous declaration she left Dapper to his reflections.

Conscious of the hostile feelings that met her on every side but one (where she would have preferred a mild hostility), conscious that in her false position, do what she would, her conduct was liable to be misunderstood, Maud's heart, usually so dauntless, sank within her. Should she exert herself to try and talk and laugh with the servants, and to interest herself, as she believed she could do sooner or later, if she chose, in their concerns, she had a conviction that Mrs. Rouse would look upon her as a forward hussy, laying herself out to attract the men. Should she continue to shut herself up within herself, which her own state of feeling, aggravated by Mr. Dapper's sickening obsequiousness, inclined her to do, then, of course, she must make up her mind to be hated by the whole household. If she could only pass the entire day with the irascible but entertaining old lady upstairs, and take her meals in solitude, Maud felt that she could be comparatively happy; the life would, at least, be endurable. But, constituted as she was, would it be endurable if she must be thrown into an hourly contact, which was close and yet could

not be intimate, with Mr. Dapper and Mrs. Rouse ? She possessed strong human sympathies ; it was that marked characteristic which had led to her throwing herself heart and soul into the joys and troubles of certain among the poor of Mortlands ; it was that which Sir Andrew termed her " confounded low radical tendencies," which had made her feel so intensely desolate when moving among the cold phantoms of polished life, and had made her yearn for more stirring interests, no matter in what sphere of society. To be no longer a drone, then, to find herself among the working bees, and to be in a state of antagonism with her fellow-workers, was a condition of things which Maud had never contemplated, and which she knew would be intolerable to her.

The afternoon passed quickly ; Mrs. Cartaret was dressed, Mrs. Rouse officiating as the chief priest, and Maud performing such minor rites as her inexperience allowed her ; after which she was instructed in her various duties by Mrs. Rouse, who read her a running homily on the conduct of servants in general and under lady's-maids in particular, to which Maud listened with a kind of obstinate patience. Then, at half-past four o'clock, there was tea, and Maud had

to undergo a modified repetition of what she had endured at dinner. Soon after that, Mrs. Cartaret sent for her. She was in her dressing-room, sitting over the fire, with an old-fashioned tambour-frame in her lap. But it was too dark to work, and Mr. Dapper had not yet thought fit to bring in the lamp.

“Is that you, Mary Hind?” began the old lady in her high-pitched voice. “Come in, and shut the door. You shall read to me when the lights come—sit down now, and turn your face to the fire, so that I can see it—H’m! I like it, and I like your voice—I think you may suit me, but I want to tell you one thing: I cannot have any girl who does not get on with Mrs. Rouse. D’ye understand, eh? You must treat her with great respect—you must do all she tells you—or . . . or . . . it will never do—never!”

“Have I treated her with disrespect, ma’am? I hope not.”

“I don’t say that you have—but . . . in short, you must do all you can to make her like you . . . be very modest and humble, eh? She is a little jealous, my faithful Mrs. Rouse, of any new-comer, and we have had so many, eh! so many! If you

could but stay, mon Dieu ! what a blessing ! but you must not be a fine lady, remember. No, no, or Rouse will never endure you. Now, here comès Dapper with the lamp, and you can go on reading where you left off—at that description of the *Siège de Carnes* (which means Dunkerque.) . . . To think that people should find such a book heavy, and read the nasty rubbish they do, instead ! But what would you ? Ah ! ‘ *C’est un siècle ennuyé, dédaigneux des fines analyses, et insensible à la grace,* ’ ” she murmured to herself, quoting the words of a great living French author, whom, at least, she excepted from her general anathema. But the quotation was not meant for her new maid.

Maud had scarcely read a page when a sound of laughter and loud voices in the courtyard below the window made her guess that the sportsmen were returned. Presently some one came whistling *La Donna è mobile* up the stairs, and a heavy pair of shooting-boots tramped loungingly along the corridor. Some fingers played the devil’s tattoo upon the panel of the door ; it opened, and a tall young man, the same whom Maud had seen in the park in the Norfolk blouse, entered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE likeness to his mother at once told her that this was Mrs. Cartaret's son ; but he was less well-looking. His height and well-balanced figure, broad in the shoulder and thin in the flank, were, indeed, his chief claims to consideration on the score of personal appearance. The nose was slightly turned up ; the mouth, veiled by a small silky moustache, was large and mobile, wearing an habitual expression of mockery, but capable of denoting also strong passion. The eyes would have been the best feature in his face, but that he was short-sighted, and wore a glass, which dimmed the brilliant light that shines through the " window of the mind," while it added no doubt to the impudent, not to say defiant, air which characterized the whole man. It is hardly necessary, after that, to state that he was too often

contemptuous and satirical; but it is well to mention that his voice was low and musical, his smile very pleasant, and that his manner, where he had a wish to please, had a peculiar charm.

He stared at Maud as he sauntered up the room, with his hands in his pockets.

“ Well, mon enfant, what sport? Here you find me with my new maid, who is a treasure, reading French to me. Come and listen to a chapter of *Le Grand Cyrus*, before we dress for dinner, eh? ”

“ Thank you, but I shall get a nap without that. You’ve had a better day’s sport than I have, mother. Few poachers on old Scudéry’s preserves, eh? It seems to me that all Salisbury must shoot over yours. It isn’t worth bringing fellows down from town for such a day as we’ve had—not above a hundred head, and we shot your two best covers. I blew up Rogers, but it’s the old story, toujours perdrix (not that we put up a single covey to-day—wish we had!), ‘Missis won’t go to the expense.’ ”

“ Well, you are only here for two or three days during the shooting season, look you, mon enfant. It is not worth while. I can buy the pheasants much cheaper than I can keep them.”

“Yes, your own pheasants, shot by some confounded poacher. You can’t understand that it is the sport, not the birds, I care about.”

“Bah! I understand sport on your Scotch moors, on the mountain-side, but to stand in an allée, and have the birds driven up to you to be knocked over, fi donc! It is not sport, mon fils. You like that they shall say, as they said of David, ‘Smith in his covert have slain his thousands, but Lowndes Cartaret his ten thousands!’ Voilà!” and the old lady laughed immoderately at her own joke.

“Well, at all events, my vanity is not to be gratified,” said her son; and then continued with a malicious twinkle of the eye: “At Compiègne, I am told, the battues now are excellent. Kenchester was there in November, and says nothing could be better, which shows what good management will do. There used to be very little game, they say, in the old time, but the Emperor arranges everything so well.”

“Va-t-en! oser me parler de ce coquin là!” cried Mrs. Cartaret, shaking her fist at her son, but laughing the next minute. “You miserable boy!” she continued, “so you think to get your pheasants by

telling me what that brigand does, eh? When you can find a nation to pay your debts, monsieur mon fils, you shall not be able to walk at Beckworth for the pheasants under your feet!"

She was delighted with her own sally, which was certainly paying her son's banter with interest, and jumping up, she caught hold of the lobe of his ear, and dragging down his face till it touched hers, she kissed him on both cheeks. She was entirely satisfied, as having come off in this little controversy with flying colours, and Lowndes could afford his mother such a small triumph, being resolved that, before next shooting season, this question of the pheasants should be settled as he wished.

"I have heard from Marly-les-Bois, mon enfant." This was said in what was intended for a whisper, but like all Mrs. Cartaret's asides, it penetrated to the further corners of the room. Then she added aloud: "Mary Hind, go and fetch to me a letter that you will find, I think, on the escritoire in my bedroom."

There was a door between the two rooms, which stood open. Maud did as she was desired, but during her search for the letter, which did not at once come

to hand, she could not avoid hearing the following fragments of colloquy :

“ Where does she come from ? Where did you get her ? ”

“ — advertisement — village-school — curate’s recommendation, gentile, tout-à-fait une lady, même trop, eh ? ”

“ A deuced good-looking girl ; but, of course, that old she-wolf of yours won’t let her stay more than a month — reads French, too ? That’s an unusual accomplishment for a village school-girl, but — ”

Here Maud lost the rest ; and she would like to have heard it. She confessed this to herself with some shame. What could it signify to her what the young man said or thought ? But she had now found the letter, and returned to the dressing-room with it.

“ There ! ” said Mrs. Cartaret. “ Read it, Lowndes ; and you, Mary, light the candles on the dressing-table. There is the first dinner-bell. In that drawer you will find a black-lace cap. Take care how you handle it ; it is very precious, child ! It belonged to Madame de Maintenon.”

“And is almost as frail as its possessor was,” said Lowndes, looking up from the letter to which he was lending but a divided attention, for no movement of Maud’s escaped him.

“Frail! Hold your tongue, sir; she was a saint. Go on and read your letter. *Juste Ciel!* What would they say at Marly-les-Bois if they could hear you! Such a pious woman! but this is the age for *médiance*? Is my hair smooth behind, child? *Mon Dieu!* How yellow I look. Give me the rouge. It won’t do to have those young men saying that Lowndes Cartaret’s mother is a horrid old hag. There, just a *soupeçon*, that will do. How do you find me now, Mary Hind? Not so bad for a woman of sixty-four, eh?”

“I like you better without the rouge, ma’am.”

“Bah! with your village-school ideas, I suppose you think it is wrong? Why, in the last century, in the good old times, no lady was dressed—would have thought to appear without her rouge! What is that you say? They were a mass of deception, with their hoops and whalebone bodies, and powdered heads! Go along with you! They were true ladies, who had the great air. That is what few have now, with their

horrid laissez-aller ways. They are all like—well, never mind what they are like—everything is democratic, common, what they call ‘simple,’ like their courts. Mon Dieu! Defend me from simplicity!”

“Does ‘the great air’ depend upon rouge, ma’am?”

Lowndes burst out laughing.

“Do you mock yourself of me, Mary Hind?” said the old lady, firing up. “Hold your tongue. I tell you nobody has it now. Monsieur mon fils, when you have done laughing, I shall be glad: you make my head to ache. You have read that letter? Well, is it not particularly satisfactory, eh?”

He had certainly not read above half of it, but, by the process called “skipping,” he had reached the end, and he now tossed it on the table.

“Particularly—to those whom it may concern—not to me. I am a fool at figures, and millions of francs always puzzle me. But I’ll pass on the marquis’s offer to a friend of mine, if you like it, a fellow who is looking out for a good thing of the kind.”

“Imbécile! Who cares about your friend? And, pray, why should it not suit you to go, look,

and judge for yourself? I say no more; now that the marquis and I have arranged the preliminaries, eh? It leaves nothing to be desired. Why should you set your face against it, pray?"

"Because I object to that sort of bargain in the first place, and because I have no desire to become the proprietor of the article that is offered me, or any other such article, indeed, in the second."

He stood behind her chair, and leaning over it, with a tenderness which took Maud completely by surprise, he put his arms round his mother's neck, so that her head was pressed against his chest; then, when he had kissed her, he said, laughingly: "You dear old woman, I wish you wouldn't trouble your head about me. I wish you would understand that I want nothing, and prefer remaining as I am."

"Take care of my cap! You are choking me, polisson que tu es! Want for nothing? But I say you do want for something. Are you never going to range yourself? Is it not time that you sowed your—how do you say?—wild corn?"

Here she sunk her voice to the level which she appeared always to consider inaudible; but Maud, who was purposely busying herself at the very

furthest end of the room, lost no syllable of what followed.

“A charming girl—a great heiress—one of the oldest families in France—what would you more, Lowndes? Ah! mon enfant, do me this pleasure. Go, present yourself: visit them. *Ca ne vous engage à rien.* If you knew—if you knew how much I desire to see you with a nice little wife and a child—an heir to this property—before I die! It is the first wish of my heart. I would give up Beckworth tomorrow. I would leave her mistress here, and go away, and trouble no one no more, if I once saw you settled, willing to live quietly here, and look after your terres.”

“Give up Beckworth! why, what would Beckworth do without you? May you reign here many a year yet, you dear old incorrigible match-maker. I shouldn't manage the estate half as well as you, and I feel no vocation yet for living quietly, and looking after my *tares*, which flourish enough of themselves—what you are pleased to call ‘my wild corn.’ As to paying a visit to Marly-les-Bois, it would bore me to death, and you would not have my early demise upon your conscience, mother? ‘At the Château de

Marly-les-Bois, of exhaustion produced by ennui, in the flower of his youth : ' it wouldn't read badly, eh ? But I've no wish to invest my name with the posthumous interest attaching to such an epitaph just at present, at all events. I dare say the young lady is all you say, and a great deal more, but I am case-hardened against female charms, and——”

“ Va-t-en, farceur ! As if I did not know daring to talk to me like that ! Est ce que tu me prends pour une imbécile ? You will get caught by some vile baggage or other, and then—and then—it will kill me—that will be the end of it. If I saw you marry beneath you, to any low creature, you might as well stick a knife into me at once. I am serious. I will not have you laugh, sir. You laugh at everything : it is a stupid habit—any fool can do that. Nothing is sacred for you—nothing ! ”

“ Certainly not the question of my marriage either with the daughter of your marquis, or with the vile baggage you imagine is to captivate me. Your wishes are among the few things that *are* sacred to me, and anything I can do to oblige you, short of marrying——”

“ There, hold your tongue ! You put me in a

rage, and that spoils my digestion. My stomach turns when you speak like that. 'Short of marrying,' indeed! . . . go and dress, it is no use talking to you—go and dress—you make me sick. My wishes sacred to you? Like other sacred things, sir, you neglect them very much. I have no patience with you—none—go and dress."

He stooped down his impudent, smiling face till it touched hers. In vain the old lady, in her irritation, tried to shake him off; like some obstinate Newfoundland puppy, which, the more it is repulsed, the closer it thrusts its muzzle into your hand, this incorrigible young man insisted upon extracting some caress in token of forgiveness before he would depart. Of course the old lady gave in, after a feeble resistance, and the young man laughed, and stretched himself, and lounged out of the room, staring at Maud as he did so, but failing to attract that young person's attention, who was busying herself at a wardrobe, and did not turn round. It is true that the wardrobe had a mirror.

Mrs. Cartaret was at last dressed, and Maud could not but acknowledge that, in spite of her low stature, in spite of her size, in spite of unfashionable, not to

say somewhat shabby, clothes, she had an "air"—whether it was "the *grand* air" Maud could not determine—which was neither grace nor dignity; but which, nevertheless, gave a distinction to her appearance. She was not a common-looking old woman, just as her son, for all his ugliness, was not a common-looking young man.

She went down into the library, and the little downy-faced lord took her in to dinner; and up-stairs, with the door open, Maud could hear bursts of merriment, blown out of the dining-room in gusts, as the servants went in and out. She was not quite sure that she liked it. She wondered whether she should like better being seated at that table as a guest. But why should she? Were not these just the sort of men she had been declaring to herself all her life that she despised? Had it not been to escape from such society as this—the *fainéants* with whom she felt she had no lot or inheritance—that she had fled from her stepfather's house, resolving henceforward to maintain herself by the labour of her own hands? It could not be that she was weak enough already to regret what she had cast from her but a few hours previously. No! a hundred times, no! She would

not find herself back at Mortlands for all the world ; and how it came to pass that she felt any curiosity, any sort of desire, to know what was passing inside that dining-room, puzzled and annoyed her.

By-and-by, Mrs. Cartaret left the men to their wine and cigars—for Lowndes had induced her to permit the malpractice of smoking in the dining-room—and then the servants' supper-bell rang, and when Maud did not obey the summons, Jane appeared with a message from Mrs. Rouse. But Maud sent back to say she was not hungry, and wanted nothing ; a step which was viewed by Mrs. Rouse as unprecedented and presumptuous, an unwarrantable infringement of the etiquette of the servants' hall, and by most of the others as a proof that she was "an uppish young 'oman, as requires to be took down a peg or two."

Mrs. Cartaret had left her fan in her room, and presently Maud, knowing that the old lady was alone, ventured downstairs with it, and knocked at the library door. She heard what she took to be "come in," and entered. Mrs. Cartaret was on the sofa, fast asleep, with a handkerchief over her face, from beneath which there issued fitful but sonorous sounds

not wholly unlike the growling remonstrances of a human voice. Her new maid, of course, did not disturb the old lady; she laid the fan on the cushion beside her, and left the room noiselessly, but not before she had glanced round it, and contrasted the faded yet comfortable aspect of the old book-room with the cold grandeur of Mortlands.

It was nearly an hour later—she was up in her own little garret, but the door was open—when she heard a few chords struck upon the piano, and being fond of music she stole down to the first landing to listen. A rich, strong man's voice was lifted up, and began Hatton's pretty ballad of "Good-by, Sweet-heart." She sat down on the top step of the stair; it was very pleasant there, in the dark, and alone, knowing the servants to be at supper, to sit and enjoy what had something in it of forbidden fruit. For she would not like to have been detected: so much she acknowledged to herself. The singer sang three or four songs, and she was confident she knew who he was. Finally, he broke into a negro melody, in the chorus of which his friends joined, and at the same minute Maud heard a clatter of feet up the back-stairs, with guffaws of female laughter. She

got up quickly, and returned to her room. But as she did so, she caught the words of one speaker: "Victuals? Lor' bless you, the like o' she don't need it. She lives upon *hair*, depend on't, she do;" which brilliant sally provoked renewed merriment.

When she went to bed that night, after undressing Mrs. Cartaret, she lay awake a long time, pondering upon many things. And through all her thoughts, charged heavily with disquietude, that tiresome tune kept worrying her, and pursued her even into the land of dreams, Good-by, Sweetheart, Good-by!

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE days went by. Maud saw Lowndes Cartaret but seldom : he was out shooting all day ; when they did meet, however, he never failed to stare at her in a way which made Maud very angry.

Her relations with the establishment, in general, remained pretty much as they were on the first day. Mrs. Cartaret had her new maid to spend the greater part of the day with her : Maud even worked in her mistress's room, for the old lady liked a companion of some sort, and her prime minister had never been very available in this capacity. Now, with company in the house, her important avocations obliged Mrs. Rouse to cede to Maud almost entirely the duties of personal attendance on her mistress. Her demeanour towards the new comer was suspicious and anta-

gonistic as ever ; Mr. Dapper's, oily and seductive ; the other servants avoiding the "stuck-up thing" as much as possible. This isolation was, perhaps, not enviable, and yet, could it have been more complete, she would have been glad. As it was, strange to say, she found herself getting to endure this life better than she could have thought possible at first. The idea of giving it up, of going to London, and seeking for work in some other form, which she had seriously entertained during the first twenty-four hours of her residence under this roof, presented itself less and less frequently to her. It was then that she wrote the letter we know of to her mother. But, after writing, the question came, how to send it ? The Salisbury post-mark might lead to detection. There was no servant in the house she would trust with it for transmission elsewhere. Nor had she a single friend in whom she could confide. But at last an expedient occurred to her. She enclosed it to the true Mary Hind at Bristol, with these words :—" Be kind enough, Mary, to post this letter to Lady Herriesson. You must not ask any questions. Some day or other you will know all. In the meantime, whatever you may hear about me, say

nothing of my having written to you—even to your future husband.” This letter she placed in the bag with her own hands.

On the third afternoon, Mrs. Cartaret went forth in state to return some neighbours' visits, and Maud was left alone in her mistress's room to complete a piece of work which the old lady was particular in her injunctions should not be removed from the apartment. The girl sat by the open window, it was so mild, and looking up from time to time, over the bare tops of the elms, and the troops of crows cawing round the house, to the blue line of distance which she knew to be Salisbury Plain, and the streaky straw-coloured sky above it, she stitched away; and, as she stitched, she broke out every now and then into little snatches of Good-by, Sweetheart, Good-by.

“Are you fond of that song?” said a voice close to her.

She half started up, and let drop her work. Lowndes Cartaret—for it was he who had entered the room without her hearing him—picked up the reels of cotton, which had rolled out of her reach, and threw himself down on a sofa near her.

“So you sing, Mary, in addition to your other accomplishments?” he continued, smiling.

“No, I don’t, sir.”

“But you do. Don’t deny it. I should have thought you above that weakness, you have such a frank face and manner. I am sorry I interrupted you now.”

“And I am sorry you have nothing better to do, sir,” she said, rather sharply; for his manner, no less than the accusation, annoyed her.

“No, we have done shooting for to-day. If I wasn’t here, I should be playing at billiards. I don’t think that is much better employment, do you?”

“At least you would be entertaining your friends, which I suppose is your business, sir—and you have none here.”

“I wasn’t wrong in thinking you were frank,” he said, laughing. “But why haven’t I any business here? This is my mamma’s room, and I suppose I may talk to her maid, mayn’t I?”

“I doubt whether Mrs. Rouse would think so. You had better go and find her—if you must talk to one of your mother’s maids.”

“Mrs. Rouse be—— No. I beg your pardon.

But we haven't quite got to such a pass yet that I can't come and sit in my mother's room without that old devil's permission. How do you and madame get on, Mary? Do you think you shall stay?"

"If Mrs. Cartaret likes me well enough to wish to keep me, I hope to stay—I only wish——" Here she stopped dead short.

"What is it you wish, eh?"

"Nothing, sir. I have thought better of it."

"That is a decided snub. So you won't place any confidence in me?"

"Why should I, sir? I am your mother's servant, and if I want anything, I can apply to her."

"Well, I have a knack of guessing. Shall I tell you what it is you want? To be taken away from the dominion of Rouse, to have no other mistress but madame."

Maud went on stitching, without reply.

"Is that it? Come, tell me."

"No, that is not it; only a very small part of it."

He looked puzzled for a moment; then cried out:—"I have it; Dapper has already begun to make love to you; he always does. He is a deuce of

a fellow with the ladies, and I believe they generally find there is no resisting him ; but you——”

“ — Do not appreciate Mr. Dapper's civilities,” said Maud, quickly, with a flushed cheek, “and the fewer I have, in my position, from any one, the better.”

“ As to that,” said Lowndes, laughing, “ why, ‘in your position,’ you are to enjoy an immunity from the common lot of humanity, I don't know. Love is the universal law, isn't it? Every one must come to it sooner or later.”

“ I thought that you——” she began, with her usual impulsiveness. Then she felt as if she could have bitten out her tongue. She knew she had committed an irreparable blunder ; and sat silent, growing scarlet. But the young man was not going to let her off so easily. With an expression of amused interest and curiosity he said :—“ Well? I am waiting. What is it you thought that I did, or did not do, eh? ”

“ I thought the other day you said—I heard you say to Mrs. Cartaret—that you were ‘ case-hardened ’ against such weakness.” She blurted it out, without looking up from her work, and felt absolutely relieved

when she heard him laugh. He attached no serious importance, then, to her indiscretion.

“ A statement of that sort is good for the purpose it serves, and it was really true enough to a certain extent. I *have* been ‘ case-hardened ’ hitherto. How long it will last I can’t say. Who knows when his hour is come ? ”

Maud felt sorely tempted to say that this was not the language of self-confidence in which he had proclaimed it to be useless for him to visit Marly-les-Bois, so impossible was it that he should be enthralled ; but she refrained, feeling that it was wiser not to prolong this discussion. Lowndes, with provoking pertinacity, would not quite abandon it, however. He continued :—“ Why do you say the fewer attentions you have, the better, Mary ? Have you left some disconsolate swain behind you that makes you so obdurate ? most girls at your age think it a very nice thing to have an admirer, particularly a fellow like Dapper, with silky whiskers, and manners to match. Jove ! when he hands round the champagne, I always feel as if *I* ought to be waiting upon *him*. There is an affability, a condescension about him ! It is as though he said, ‘ I know I am demeaning

myself, but do not be afraid; I will go through it, I will show you how one of Nature's noblemen can play the flunky.' Is it possible that this is lost upon you, Mary?"

She saw he was trying to draw her out; and the satirical play about the corners of his mouth nettled her.

"I suppose, like some other lords of the creation, sir, you think all women are fools?"

"Not at all. On the contrary, I think in many ways they are a vast deal sharper than we are. But, as I said before, girls in your position——"

"Cannot possibly have a grain of common sense? Your experience, if varied, sir, has been unfortunate, I should say. Servants, though you might not think it, are really not always more vain and foolish than their betters."

"That's right; hit hard, Mary. I have a broad back, and can bear it. So you think me vain and foolish, eh?"

"I didn't say so, sir."

"No; but that is what you meant. Now, I return evil for good, Mary, for I think you are neither one nor the other. From the first moment I saw you, I——"

“ This conversation, at all events, is very foolish, sir; there can be no doubt about that. If you are going to talk nonsense, I shall leave the room. Mrs. Rouse——”

“ The devil take Mrs. Rouse! Who cares for *her*? If she ventures to poke in her nose where she is not wanted, I shall send her packing.”

Maud was saved from the necessity of making any rejoinder by the sound of carriage-wheels, the barking of dogs, and the ringing of the hall-door bell, which told of Mrs. Cartaret's return. Lowndes at once rose, and, with a few laughing words, strolled towards the door. The act needed no comment. Maud would have been seriously annoyed had he remained, and his mother found him here. Had Maud not discouraged his staying so long by every means in her power? Therefore she could not but feel relieved at his departure. And yet it hurt her pride to think that she should be submitted to this—that any man should make her the amusement of half an hour, and then leave her at the first indication of his mother's approach.

From that day forwards Lowndes Cartaret lost no opportunity of seeing and, whenever he could, of

talking to his mother's new maid. It was in vain to try and avoid him. Her place was in Mrs. Cartaret's room, and when the young man was not out shooting or hunting, he was in that room the greater part of the time. When visitors came, and Mrs. Cartaret was necessarily kept in the drawing-room, if Lowndes was in the house, it invariably happened that he strolled up into the boudoir. His friends were gone; he himself was due at one or two country-houses; and yet, to Mrs. Cartaret's pleasure and surprise, he lingered on at Beckworth from day to day. He dined with his neighbours, and occasionally one or other of them dined with him: this was the only society he had; and yet a whole fortnight went by, and he did not seem bored, or in a hurry to get away. No one, I believe, up to this time, suspected the real reason of this; and yet that reason was not far to seek. One of those violent passions, the growth of a few days only, which are sometimes lasting in such men, but are far more often transient, had taken possession of his whole being. To use his own expression, "his hour had come;" but he did not recognise the fact at first. He was young, he had strong passions, and he was but little accustomed to self-restraint; he

looked upon this as one of those conquests which, if less facile than any he had ever undertaken, was not the less a pastime for the hour. That this was no will-o'-the-wisp, but a real fire, to which he was unwittingly adding fuel day by day, till it should burn his very heart out, till it should come to be at once an all absorbing thought and a terror unto himself—this was what he never foresaw in those early days. Attracted first by her handsome face and figure, and secondly by her peculiar manner, the bluntness of which excited him in the pursuit far more than the coquetries to which he was used, each time he talked to her he was more and more struck by her shrewdness, the unflinching truth of what she said, and her skill in parrying his attacks. He was used to the conversation of women (of whom society now has plenty, and an increasing stock of examples), with whom he could say many things that would have been better left unsaid, perhaps; and talking to any others, the wives and daughters of his quiet country neighbours, for instance, generally bored him horribly. But here was a girl—only a maid-servant, too!—to whom he very soon found he could *not* say anything he liked, and yet who did not bore him; but very

much the contrary. It was a new and strange experience; he could not account for it; he could only accept it as a fact which he felt to be asserting itself more strongly every day.

How came it to pass that the lynx-eyed Rouse never suspected what was going on all this time? Fate for some days favoured Lowndes; but the jealousy of the disappointed Dapper at last revealed to him the truth; and, through him, that truth reached his formidable colleague in office.

"She flies at 'igh game, she does, Mrs. Rouse. Her equals is not good enough for 'er. I come in with the coals, and there, sure enough, was Mr. Lowndes and 'er alone—'er at 'er work, and 'im lolling on the sofa—chatting away like anything, she as won't so much as open 'er mouth to answer a civil thing when I speak. It's easy to understand now why she gives 'erself such *hairs*."

"I'll soon put a stop to that!" said Mrs. Rouse, flaming up. "I won't have nothing disrespectful go on in this house—let it be master, or let it be man. *You* know that, Mr. Dapper. I won't have no skylarking and playing the fool as long as *I'm* here, and so I'll tell Mr. Lowndes

to his face. Only I'll make sure that you're right first."

And she left no stone unturned to make sure ; but was unable to detect a single act of encouragement or doubtful propriety in the girl's demeanour towards the son of her mistress ; though Mrs. Rouse bounced into the boudoir at all hours, now, on some pretext or other. Once only did she find them alone ; and then Maud was at one end of the room, busying herself at some shelves, and the young man was at the other, with his back to her, looking out of window. This is what had happened. He had come in, as usual, to his mother's boudoir, on ascertaining that Maud was alone there ; and, after talking to her for some time, he said abruptly :—" I want to know, Mary, where you were educated ? "

" At school, sir, of course. Why do you ask ? "

" Because your education is a cut above your station. I never heard of a village-girl speaking French before. "

" It is my only accomplishment—I hope there is no harm in it ? A young lady " (she was thinking of herself who taught the real Mary Hind) " thought it

might be useful to me when I went out to service, and so gave me some lessons."

"What prevision! She must have had Beckworth in her eye. As to me, I was always so bothered about French, that I hate it. And then its history! Do you know I never have been able to master all those confounded kings my mother is so fond of, yet!"

"So I should think. It needs some application and perseverance to master history, neither of which, I imagine, you possess."

"You are wrong, Mary. I have no application, but plenty of perseverance, when the object is one I care sufficiently about."

"What a pity——" Here she broke off.

"Dear me! I have lost my needle!"

"Here it is. Well? What is a pity? Come, out with it."

"No, Mr. Cartaret, it was nothing. I was forgetting myself."

"Nonsense! Come, what was it?"

"Well, then, I was going to say, what a pity it is you don't care sufficiently about something that is useful in life. An independent young man like you

can, of course, do what he chooses. To see him wasting his best years in idleness is deplorable, I think. But then I have a very strong feeling about idleness. I left my home because I could not stand it."

"What you call usefulness is all humbug, Mary. Some fellows like fancying they do an enormous deal of work, and they make asses of themselves on the magistrates' bench, and preside at agricultural dinners, and spout some rubbish they have got up beforehand, and these are the men that are called 'useful in their generation.' It is all humbug."

"I don't think so. It is not humbug to the men themselves. They are at least doing *themselves* less harm than passing their lives with a gun, a cigar, or a billiard-cue for ever in their hand."

"You little utilitarian, that is a hit at me!" cried Lowndes, laughing; and, as she stretched out her hand to reach the scissors, he tried to seize it. She drew it quickly back. "Never mind, I'd rather have that little hand in mine than all the guns, and cigars, and billiard-cues put together, Mary."

"If I wanted to confirm the truth of what I was saying, Mr. Cartaret, your folly would be enough.

You have nothing in the world to do, so you try and kill time by talking nonsense here."

"Wrong again, Mary. I have more than enough that I *ought* to be doing. I was due at Uplands on Monday, and at the Grange yesterday, and I preferred remaining here."

"The more shame for you! A mere pleasure-seeker, who does no good to himself or any one else either, always seems to me to be a wretched creature. I have the greatest contempt for such people."

She got up, and walked to the other end of the room, and he, in his anger, turned to the window. "Wretched creature!" "Contempt!" He had never heard such words, ever so distantly, applied to himself before: he, the idol of mother, friends, society in general, and women in particular! She had certainly succeeded in making him very angry, if this was her object. He vowed, as he stood there, gnawing his lip at the window, that this insolent village-girl should be made to pay dearly for treating him thus. And it was just then that Mrs. Rouse bounced in.

"I thought missis was here," muttered the housekeeper.

“How the deuce could you think that when she told you, half an hour ago, she was going down to see Rogers’s sick child at the cottage!”

“Really, sir . . . I . . . well, I thought she had returned. . . . But really, Mr. Lowndes, I’m not accustomed,—no, sir, I’m *not*,—to be spoken to in that sort of way, Mr. Lowndes.”

“Perhaps it is a pity you are not accustomed to it a little oftener,” thundered out the young man. “Go downstairs, and desire James to bring my cob round to the door, and be good enough, in future, Mrs. Rouse, not to burst into the room in that sort of way when I am here.” And having vented his rage thus upon the first object that came to hand, he strode off, without so much as looking in Maud’s direction.

As soon as the door had slammed behind him, Mrs. Rouse’s indignation, which quivered through her mighty frame, burst forth:—“Very pretty, upon *my* word! Well! a nice pass things is come to, when I mayn’t come into my own missis’s room without saying ‘by your leave’ to *him*, indeed! But I can tell him I’m not going to stand being spoke to in that way, and wouldn’t, not if it was fifty Mr. Lowndeses. But I’ll speak to Mrs. Cartaret, I will.

I'll tell her that I don't know what Mr. Lowndes is after up here, when she is out, but I ain't going to be shut out of my own missis's room, as is my rightful place, not for him, nor for you either, Mary Hind. And I must say this, young woman ; that afore you came, I never knew Mr. Lowndes to misbehave hisself, and use such language to me, as has been his mother's servant these sixteen years and more, and it's *very strange*, that's all I have to say, and I'd advise you to look sharp what you're about, Mary Hind, that's all."

Whereat the irate housekeeper also strode off, and slammed the door behind her. And Maud stood there, and said nothing. Her impetuosity would naturally have led her to reply in strong language to Mrs. Rouse's innuendoes, but something at her heart, something which Mrs. Rouse's words did not, indeed, reach, but which lay there like a stone, seemed to choke her, to paralyse any power of self-justification. And yet Heaven knew how untrue it was that she had encouraged Lowndes Cartaret to seek her society. Had she not told him over and over again to leave her? Had she ever given him reason to think that his presence was agreeable to her? Had she not, on

the contrary, spoken so rudely to him more than once, that any other man than this would have considered her language unpardonable? Nay, at that very minute, had it not been her words which had led to his venting his spleen upon Mrs. Rouse? And yet—and yet, there was that at her heart which leaped up, and seemed to impede her utterance when her pride urged her to repel the insinuations of the angry housekeeper. It was shamefully, miserably weak—she would not acknowledge it to herself—it could not be that she should be unable boldly and truthfully to declare that this man's presence was less than nothing, was absolutely distasteful to her. She didn't believe in falling in love. She believed in strong and passionate attachments, the result of time, and grounded upon bases solid enough to support such a structure; she could not, would not admit the possibility of a sentiment where there was but little knowledge, and could be neither esteem nor admiration. It degraded her in her own eyes to think that she should submit to this young man's attentions with any tolerance, considering their relative positions, and the light in which he, of course, regarded her. And yet there was the fact; argue,

deny it, as she might, it remained none the less a fact; she took the keenest interest in all that concerned him; the very sharpness with which she reproved his follies showed it; had she been quite indifferent, she would have been less severe.

In the meantime, Mrs. Rouse had got to think better of her heated resolution. To complain of her son's language to Mrs. Cartaret would be entirely useless, she knew; she would be pooh-poohed, and put off with some very unsatisfactory apology, which was far from the complete triumph she had made up her mind she would obtain. She would bide her time, until she obtained proof, which she felt certain would not be long wanting, of his designs, if not of his actual misconduct, towards this new intruder in the establishment, whom Mrs. Rouse had now determined to evict. Mrs. Cartaret was getting a great deal too thick with her; all this *parlez-vousing*, and writing of her mistress's letters, inspired Mrs. Rouse with a mortal hatred and mistrust of the girl, who certainly did nothing to conciliate her. She must be got rid of; about that there was no sort of doubt; and if she could be caught tripping it would be a very short way of cutting the knot of this difficulty. So

Mrs. Rouse said nothing to Mrs. Cartaret that evening. And before she laid her virtuous head upon its pillow, her reticence was rewarded in a way that surpassed her fondest hopes.

Some hunting squires dined with Lowndes Cartaret that evening, and he drank more wine than usual. He had not seen Maud since he had walked out of the boudoir in rage, after venting some portion of it upon Mrs. Rouse. His passion for the girl, and his anger at her treatment of him, were both inflamed by the wine he had taken ; so that when his guests left him, he was in a restless, irritable frame of mind and body, walking up and down the library for nearly an hour, feeling unable to sleep, unable to resolve on any plan of action, while a thousand wild schemes presented themselves to his imagination. At last it occurred to him that he would not keep up the men-servants any longer, but go to his own room. He rang the bell, and without taking a candle (it was a fancy of his never to carry one about the house : he could find his way anywhere in the dark, and in his own room there was a fire), he went slowly and heavily upstairs. At the top of the landing ran a corridor, which he had to traverse, and half-way

down which was the door of his mother's room. Just as he entered this corridor, the door opened, and Maud, with her candle, came out. He stood still, and she came quickly towards him—so quickly, that with the light held just before her eyes, she did not see him. He opened his arms, and she literally ran into them. Her candle fell clattering to the ground—there was a stifled cry, and before the indignant girl could free herself, and break away, her face was covered with burning kisses.

And at the other end of the passage stood Mrs. Rouse, with a candle in her hand, looking on.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning was destined to be an eventful one at Beckworth. First of all, Mrs. Rouse entered her mistress's room at an unusually early hour, and dragging back the curtains with a violent jerk, as though resolved that, at length, full daylight should be thrown upon the iniquities she was about to unveil, she began, in a loud rousing voice: "Well! I should say as it was time you was awake, ma'am, and had your eyes open to the pretty doin's as are goin' on in *this* house! What did I tell you, ma'am? Didn't I warn you, as you can't say I didn't, that she was a artful designing minx, and we should have trouble with her before she'd been in the house a month?"

"Mon Dieu, Rouse, what is the matter? What is it? Do not keep me in suspense in this way."

“The matter is, ma’am, I’m sorry to have to say it, that she’s been and got round Mr. Lowndes, till he’s just mad after her—and that’s all about it. He insulted me shameful yesterday when I come into the room and found ’em together. Not that I’d ha’ spoke to you about *that*, ma’am; no, not if it wasn’t for what I was witness to with my own eyes, last night. I couldn’t have believed that he could ha’ demeaned hisself to do such a thing—I couldn’t, indeed—your *own* maid, and all!”

“Why, what on earth did he do? Mon Dieu! woman, can’t you speak?” cried Mrs. Cartaret, sitting now bolt upright in her bed, and beating the coverlet in her impatience.

“Do, ma’am?” responded the housekeeper, who seemed to find a cruel satisfaction in prolonging her mistress’s suspense. “It was doin’s such as I never see in *this* house. You might ha’ knocked me down with a feather, and I haven’t slep’ a wink all night, to think how you’ve been deceived—you as had such a *high* opinion of the young woman, ma’am, which you was nourishing a viper in your bosom, as I well foresaw.” Then seeing that Mrs. Cartaret’s impatience was passing all bounds, and that in

another minute she would be out of bed, and shaking Mrs. Rouse by the collar (as the choleric old lady had once been known to treat an obstinate housemaid), she continued : “ I can hardly bring myself to say it, ma’am ; but they was a kissing and a hugging of each other in the passage, and she *pretending* to struggle—the artful hussy !—till she saw me, and then she took to her heels fast enough, I’ll warrant you ! After that, ma’am, I suppose you’ll agree with me that the sooner the jade’s packed off, out o’ the house, the better.”

“ Juste Ciel ! ” cried Mrs. Cartaret, clasping her hands, “ but it is impossible. My good Rouse, you must be mistaken. What ! that quiet girl ? Your eyes must have deceived you. My son, alas ! yes, he perhaps—foolish boy——”

“ I tell you what it is, Mrs. Cartaret. I don’t wish to say nothin’ disrespectful against Mr. Lowndes, which it’s my belief it’s much more the gal’s fault than his, but if you don’t send her off, then and there, I won’t answer for the consequences ; that’s all. If Mr. Lowndes is ‘ foolish ’ as you say, ma’am, so much the worse—he’ll get took in the easier ; and there’s Mr. Dapper. I don’t know what it is the men see in

the gal, but she'd ha' made a fool of him, too, only she flied at higher game. She's a regular crocodile—that's what she's, ma'am ; the house hasn't been like itself since she come ; a-giving herself such airs, indeed ! To think that Mr. Lowndes should ha' spoke to me so, which have had him on my knee when he was eight year old—and all along of a good-for-nothing creature like that !”

“ Oh, dear !” moaned Mrs. Cartaret, dropping back into her pillows, and twisting round so that she turned her back upon Rouse, and drew the clothes half over her head, as though to shut out, if possible, a disagreeable subject. “ Oh, dear ! It is very hard that I am never to have a maid for three months, but something or other happens. It is too bad of Lowndes, and the girl suited me so well. It is shameful ! If he would but range himself, now, and marry ! But he shall. I will have it. Oh, dear ! I am so tired. I cannot talk any more. There, go away, my good Rouse, now, and leave me quiet for a little, and say nothing of this. I will speak to Mr. Lowndes by-and-by, and don't let the girl come to me till—till I have seen him. There !”

Then she rolled herself up yet more tightly, and Rouse knew that her mistress had taken refuge in an old expedient against further discussion. She left the room. Two minutes afterwards Jane delivered a message to Maud to say that Mrs. Cartaret would ring when she wanted her maid, and that the latter was not to go to her mistress until then.

In the meantime, Lowndes, guessing accurately what would occur, resolved to take the bull by the horns. As soon as he was dressed, he entered his mother's bedroom. She pretended to be asleep: she felt a moral coward in approaching this subject with her son, and had not half made up her mind yet what she would say to him. But Lowndes was as ruthless as Mrs. Rouse in his way.

"Come, mother, it's ten o'clock, and time you were awake. I want to talk to you."

"Eh? What's the matter? How you disturb me!"

"Have you seen Rouse this morning?"

"Eh? seen Rouse? Well—yes, I have seen her."

"Did she say anything to you about me?"

With a sudden jerk Mrs. Cartaret now unswathed

herself, and sat erect in bed. It was no longer possible to temporise: the moment for vigorous action was come.

“Yes, she did, Lowndes, and I was shocked—shocked and grieved at what she told me. Such conduct is to have no respect for me and my house. And what is the consequence? I must now send away a girl who suited me in all respects, who was a perfect treasure to me; but she must go, for how can I keep about me any one whom you regard—whom you treat in this sort of way?”

“Now, that is just the point, mother, just what I want to talk to you about. I knew very well that old cat would move heaven and earth to turn the girl out of the house: and I want you to understand that she is entirely blameless. What Rouse saw was my fault: the girl had given me no encouragement to behave as I did: I was an idiot. After all, there was no such great harm: I met her running down the passage, in the dark, and I kissed her. I was a confounded fool for my pains, I admit. I ought to have reflected that the girl, so proud and modest as she is, would resent this, and complain to you, as I feel sure she will, and, in all probability, tell you herself that

she must go. But you must insist upon her staying."

"Impossible! How can I, Lowndes? I shall seem to wink at you! . . . to encourage immorality! Dapper, Rouse, what will they think? . . . Hein?"

"Who cares what they think? Can't you decide, for once in your life, whether you will keep a servant or not, without asking their permission?"

"Permission?" said his mother, bridling. "No, it is not a question of *permission*, but one must consider the qu'en dira-t-on. They say, they imagine, Lowndes, that there is more than this folly of yours last night. They say you have been found sitting and talking with her. Enfin! . . . I am very sorry, it is a real trouble to me: I shall never find such a maid again—never! But I see it must not be. No. I ought not to submit a young girl to temptation, and she must go."

"I'll be hanged if she shall, then. I'll tell you what, mother: if you send her away, I'll leave Beckworth to-morrow, and won't return here this year."

"Oh!" cried the old lady, firing up. "Vous le prenez sur ce ton là, monsieur mon fils? Very well,

then, go! Do not let me keep you. If the girl is your maîtresse, take her out of the house with you, but——”

“Stop, mother. The girl is as pure as any in the country: I’ll swear it. You mustn’t think because I spoke as I did just now that there has been anything between us. . . . I was a fool for saying what I did, but the injustice of the thing struck me. It is such a confounded shame that she should be made to suffer for my fault. . . . You see I am what you would call *découverté* here. . . . I have nothing to do——”

“Whose fault is that, *mon enfant*? What am I always telling you? If you would but marry and range yourself, and take the management of the estate into your own hands?”

“Well, we won’t enter upon that old discussion again now. . . . I was going to say that, having nothing on earth to do here, and finding this Mary Hind a pleasant, well-spoken girl, I have chatted with her once or twice. That is the whole history out of which these miserable servants have concocted their scandalous lies. Now, it is too bad that the girl should lose her place, and you a maid who suits

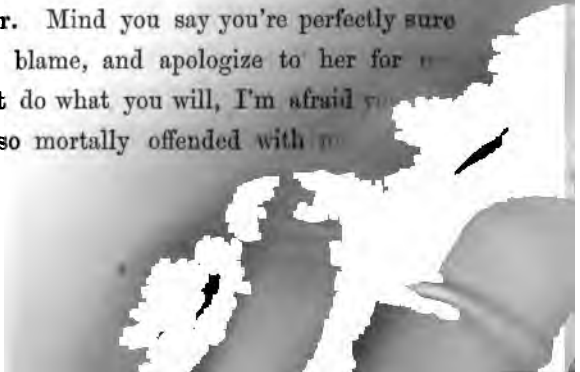
you, to gratify their spite. You'll never get another to read *Le Grand Cyrus* to you," added the young man artfully.

Mrs. Cartaret was in sad perplexity : between her son and Rouse, she was on the horns of a dilemma ; and then there was her own inclination and her sense of what was prudent under the circumstances gently pulling her in different directions. She cleared her throat loudly, and shook her head, and frowned, and muttered several times that it was "impossible ;" and then with a half-fierce, half-piteous expression of face looked up at her son and said : "Will you promise never to speak to her, if she remains—eh ?"

"I will promise never to repeat my conduct of last night."

"No, no, that is not enough, you must not give the servants cause to talk by speaking with her, do you understand ?"

"How is it possible to promise that ? It is nonsense, mother. But look here. You see the girl, and talk to her. Mind you say you're perfectly sure she is not to blame, and apologize to her for her conduct. But do what you will, I'm afraid you will find she is so mortally offended with me



will be uncommonly hard to get her to stay, and you'll then understand how absurdly groundless your fears are."

After some further hesitation, Mrs. Cartaret consented to do this. Lowndes left the room; but he was too deeply interested in the result of the interview between his mother and her maid to go further than the adjoining boudoir: and he left the door a-jar. Mrs. Cartaret rang the bell.

Maud obeyed the summons, looking pale and stern. Before her mistress could speak, the girl began proudly: "I will save you the trouble of giving me warning, ma'am. Mrs. Rouse has, of course, told you what occurred last night. Perhaps she has put her own construction on it—no matter. I am ready to go when you like—to-day, if you please—indeed, the sooner, the better."

"Stay, Mary Hind, do not be in too great hurry—yes—I know what occurred—I know that my son strangely forgot himself—and he is much ashamed of himself, my dear. That is true; you may believe it. I am very sorry—very sorry, indeed, Mary, and I——" (here the old lady hesitated a moment, and insensibly lowered her voice, as though

half-ashamed of her weakness)—“and I hope you will not go on this account, eh? It shall not occur again; he promises it, *foi de gentilhomme*. I know it was not the least your fault, my dear. He is a wild boy, you see—*jeunesse*—but he has not a bad heart, no, and you must forgive him this once, eh? *voyons*. Think no more about it, and I will take care that it does not trouble you again. *Du reste*, he will be going in a few days.”

A world of conflicting feelings were in Maud's breast. Ought the old lady's words, or anything else, to induce her to remain here after the insult to which she had been subjected? Her pride said “no:” but there was another voice, which pleaded loudly with her to yield. And as she stood there, silent, for some minutes, her back turned to the bed, her face towards the window, Mrs. Cartaret understanding something (not all) of what was passing in the girl's mind, exclaimed: “*Tenez!* He shall tell Rouse himself—there! That shall make it all straight, *hein!* She is—well a little—just a little *jalouse*, you see (what did I tell you? why have you not made her your friend?) but she shall believe the truth; yes, and she shall not repeat the story: there

shall be no scandale : I will not have it. I like you, Mary Hind. I cannot spare you—do you hear? You must not go, because this mauvais sujet of mine has behaved a little badly, hein? Come, say you will stay, and forget it all.”

“Such things are not easily forgotten,” said Maud, shaking her head. “Your son must think very lightly of me, to have treated me as he did; and if I stay here, will he not think still worse of me, for not seeming to resent his conduct? I am sorry to leave you, Mrs. Cartaret. I am homeless, and you have been very kind to me. But no girl who respects herself ought willingly to remain in a house where the master——

“He is *not* the master here. Mon Dieu; Mary Hind, do you not see that he directs nothing, looks to nothing here? I wish he would. I would give it all up to him, if he would marry and live here. But no, he will not—and he is *not* master. He spends here—what? a few weeks, tout au plus, in the course of the year. When he goes, next week, I shall see him no more till who knows when! Come, now, you will not leave me on his account? Soyez gentle, ma petite,” she added, with a sort of

little supplicating whine, to which she resorted in great emergencies, "and say that you will not leave me. Tenez! I shall give you five pounds a year more, there? That shall decide you, come!"

Maud could not help smiling in spite of her serious ground for annoyance, as she told Mrs. Cartaret that an increase of wages could in no way affect her decision. She consented, however, to stay—at all events for the present; she would not inconvenience Mrs. Cartaret by a precipitate departure, she said: only it should be understood that this was not a definite, but a temporary arrangement, subject to circumstances, which meant of course, subject to Mr. Lowndes's good behaviour.

That young gentleman, listening in the next room to all that passed, was in high spirits at the result of this interview. He felt as all men do who have just escaped paying the full penalty of their own folly, a sense of inexpressible, almost unhopd for relief. For the fact was that only now, when he was so near losing her for ever, did he awake to a full consciousness of his real feeling for the girl. It was not to be accounted for, or argued about; but he who had never so much as singd his

wings at any of the gilded tapers round which he had fluttered, had flown into the heart of the flame of this domestic rushlight, and found himself lying there at its feet, burnt, suffering, incapable of flying away! It would have been humiliating, only that he had passed—or skipped over, as it were—that phase of feeling, and had reached the one where we try to justify to ourselves some extravagant act towards which passion impels us, and in judging which we should be so inexorable, if the delinquent were our dearest friend. He could no longer conceal from himself that he was madly in love: the idea of Maud's leaving the house, and leaving it in just wrath with him, had given him some hours of the only poignant suffering he had ever known. In his wild, insane folly he had treated with disrespect a girl whom he knew, whom he had known all the time, ought to be as secure from insult at his hands as the highest lady in the land. Had he alienated her for ever? The question, in some form or other, was for ever present to him. Yet, where did it lead? To one of two ends. It was in vain to shut his eyes; there was no escape from one of two ends! And one of these, the one which no doubt he had

more or less had in view all along, seemed now more unattainable, more hopeless than ever.

How Mrs. Cartaret faced Rouse, and broke to that turbulent chief subject the fact that, in spite of everything, the new favourite was not to be discharged, this narrative need not recount; for more important events, and having an immediate bearing on the matter in hand, now followed quickly. Another interview, however, on that same day, must be detailed, in order fully to understand the position of the chief actors on this circumscribed stage towards each other.

Maud had a bad headache; she looked so ill in the afternoon that Mrs. Cartaret, who was not generally very observant of aspects, made her leave off reading, and insisted upon her going out into the park. "You shall remain out, at the least, two hours; do you hear? My beloved Madame Royale used to say there was nothing like fresh air for a migraine. There, go along with you, petite;" and, nothing loth, Maud obeyed the mandate. She, who was so accustomed to her long walks and rides, felt the confinement of her new life more than she chose to acknowledge to herself. Women of resolute will

are often slow to acknowledge facts which interfere with what they have arranged is to be the course of events. Maud was of this number.

She chose the quietest path, one which led to a distant shrubbery, where no one ever walked. She had not been there ten minutes before she was joined by Lowndes Cartaret, who chose a circuitous route to the spot where he watched her directing her steps. It was no use trying to avoid him, unless she had taken to her heels, which was not Maud's way of escaping a difficulty which had to be met, sooner or later. It must come: she had foreseen that; but her anger was still so hot, she felt so shaken, so unsettled in her mind as to what she should or should not say and do, that she would fain have deferred this meeting for a time, had it been possible.

He came up straight to her, and said: "Mary, can you forgive me? I think I must have been drunk last night, or your sharp words in the morning had made me mad, I don't know which. I wasn't myself, or I shouldn't have acted like such a cursed fool as I did."

"It is of very little consequence now, Mr. Car-

target, whether you were drunk or not, after making me the common talk of the servants' hall. My remaining here will be difficult—perhaps impossible—owing to your unmanly conduct. Nothing that I could say, of course, would persuade Mrs. Rouse (even if I stooped to defend myself) that you had not very good ground for believing you might treat me as you did with impunity. . . . If I stay here, it must be to feel that I am despised by the women, and subject to a similar insult from every groom in your stable.”

“By Jove! I should just like to catch one, that's all! Let me know the first one that dares to treat you with any disrespect, and——”

“Oh, sir! you have yourself shown them the way. Any one of them is as much justified in behaving so as you were. Is it to be expected that men in their . . . I mean, in my class of life, men who have not had the advantages of education, should treat a girl with more delicacy, more respect, than their master shows her?”

“What you say is perfectly true, Mary. It only makes me more ashamed of myself, for there is that about you which I am sure *would* have prevented any

groom from insulting you. . . . The fact is, you are perfectly different from every other girl in your station I ever saw, and——”

“And so you think no other girl in my station would resent your conduct?” she interrupted vehemently. “Your standard of women must be even lower than I thought it, if you really believe that. But you do not believe it. Of course, I know perfectly well that if I were a lady, if I were in your own rank of life, you would not have treated me so . . . it was only because I was a servant you thought you might try the experiment.”

“You are quite mistaken,” said Lowndes, with, for an instant, a touch of the careless sarcasm which was so common to him, except latterly in his intercourse with Maud. “You are quite mistaken. I have treated more than one lady so, who has not taken it at all amiss. . . . But do not think I say this to exonerate myself, for I knew you were not one of this sort. . . . Mary, you must not leave my mother, and in the course of time you will get to think better of me, I hope.”

“I have promised her that I will stay—for the present; and therefore, unless I am driven away——”

“How should you be driven away? Not by those servants I should hope; and certainly not by me.”

“I don’t know that, unless you bear in mind our respective positions better than you have done. The gossips of the house are probably now full of the fact that you have met me here, and charitably conclude that it is an appointment, no doubt. Henceforward it is absolutely necessary, after your conduct, Mr. Cartaret, that you should avoid me altogether. On these conditions only shall I be able to remain here.”

“It is a hard penalty to pay for my folly, Mary.”

“Pray, do you consider what *I* have to pay for it? To you the deprivation of the right to bestow your idle half-hours upon your mother’s lady’s-maid must be a severe trial, no doubt! To her, the cost of all this is simply loss of reputation, which is not worth speaking of! It really maddens me to think what we have to suffer from the selfishness of men.”

“You’re too hard upon me, Mary; but I suppose I must yield, since you insist on it. But if I go away from home for a time, will you promise me two things?”

She paused for a moment. "Name them."

"One is that you will not be induced, by any means that may be tried, to leave my mother while I am absent. Of course, that old Rouse won't rest satisfied with her defeat; but you stick to my mother like a leech, Mary; don't you leave her, let them do what they will."

"Very well," she replied, after an instant's reflection, "I think I can promise that."

"The other is——" he turned towards a tree, and began hacking at it with his penknife. "How long have you been here, Mary."

"Three weeks and four days."

"Only that? and for the first four days I never said a word to you! And yet it seems as if I had known you three months, Mary. I have never met any girl towards whom I felt in the least as I feel towards you."

She started, and turned red, and tried to mask her real emotion by a sarcastic inflection of voice.

"So I should think, judging from the special tribute you paid my exceptional merits last night; a sort of refined compliment which the other girls you 'have met' are fortunate to have been spared."

“Don't be too hard on me, Mary. I want you to believe that I am in earnest in what I say, and this is not the passing whim of a moment. I have never seen any woman I could love as a wife but you. But to prove to you my sincerity, I only ask you to wait. I will go from home, yes, if you will remain here, and will promise to listen to me, and try and like me when I return. I know you would never marry me unless you did. I know, too, beforehand, all your scruples—all you will say about my mother, and her strong feelings as to caste. It is of no use entering upon that now. But, by-and-by, three months hence, when I come back, if you can bring yourself to care about me, all that shall be made straight: I swear it shall.”

When he had finished, Maud remained silent; and yet she knew that every instant aggravated the necessity of her saying something.

“I certainly can't promise what you wish, Mr. Cartaret. Putting my own feelings aside, and how recently you have outraged them, I should be disloyal towards your mother if I permitted you to use such language as this without—without—In short, if I am to believe that you are in earnest, of course

the sooner you go away and forget this nonsense, the better. Think how your smart friends would laugh if they could hear you! I will remain with Mrs. Cartaret, for she has been most kind to me; but for that very reason it would be doubly ungrateful of me to encourage this mad idea of yours. When you come back——" (she wanted to say, "I hope," but could not), "no doubt you will have forgotten it. And now, sir, it is getting dusk; I must return to the house."

And without waiting for his rejoinder she turned away, and walked rapidly across the park.

Lowndes Cartaret went up to London by the mail-train that night. His mother was always sorry when he left Beckworth; but at this particular moment, perhaps, she felt less so than usual. It was just as well, after what it pleased her to style his "stupid" conduct of the previous night, that he and Mary Hind should not meet for a time. Might it not be regarded in some sort as a concession to Mrs. Rouse and public opinion in the servants' hall?

Her satisfaction was of short duration. Early on the following morning a shabby man in a great coat came to the back-door, and asked to see Mary

Hind. Mrs. Rouse, being informed of the fact, said it was just "like her impudence," and sailed out with an empurpled visage to tell the stranger to be off, as "no followers" were allowed *here*. But he said that in reply which caused her to change her tone.

The next minute he and the housekeeper were seated in her own room, with closed doors.

CHAPTER X.

WE must now return to Mortlands and John Miles.

Lady Herriesson had received no second letter from her daughter ; and Sir Andrew had at last felt it necessary to insert an advertisement in *The Times* ; but of so vague a nature that it was difficult for even those who knew to whom it referred to recognize Maud in the description given of the “ missing young lady.”

One Saturday morning, as the curate was leaving the school, the mistress said to him : “ I suppose, sir, you have heard the news about Mary Hind ? ”

“ No—what ? ”

“ She is to be married to-day, sir. Mrs. Jones came from Bristol yesterday, and chanced to meet her, and Mary told her herself, and seemed surprised it wasn't known at Mortlands, for she said she had

written to Miss Pomeroy long ago ; but I suppose the letter came after Miss Pomeroy went, or you would have heard it, leastways——”

The good woman went on to repeat all that Mrs. Jones had told her as to Mary's good fortune ; but the curate lent only half an ear to her discourse. His thoughts had shot suddenly into a side-groove, whereby this subject connected itself with the one which now mainly engrossed him. During the past fortnight, nearly everything to which he tried to turn his attention did so connect itself. 'Liza was seriously disquieted about her master. As she observed to all her friends, his conduct was quite unnatural. Whereas he was always wont to praise her broths and bread-and-butter puddings, he now never noticed what victuals she set before him. If the neighbourhood was still in a state of ferment about Miss Pomeroy's disappearance, it may be imagined what far deeper interest that subject had for the curate, whose love, though he felt it to be irrational and utterly hopeless, nothing could ever destroy. At first, as I have said, he tried to believe that she had taken refuge with some friend. But why, then, this mystery ? this obstinate silence ?

She was of age, and might insist upon choosing her own residence, if any one had offered her a home. She had not a farthing of her own: that he knew, for she had told him so. What course had she taken which necessitated such a scandal as this? Why should she be at such pains to baffle every effort to trace her hiding-place?

The schoolmistress's words, then, set John thinking on the old subject, only, this time with new matter for speculation. The postmark on Maud's letter to Lady Herriesson had been *Bristol*—yet every inquiry instituted there had proved fruitless. Maud, he knew, had heard from Mary Hind—at least so she had told him—only three or four days before her flight. If so, if she had received a letter from the girl, it must have been the one notifying to her former mistress the girl's projected change of condition. At all events one thing was clear: she had not taken service, as Miss Pomeroy had given him to understand Mary was about to do, having obtained a situation mainly through the instrumentality of his written recommendation. He went over, in his own mind, every little circumstance of that last morning's interview, when he had chanced to pick up the letter

Maud had dropped. He recalled now the fact that the letter was directed to M. H., and remembered, too, the momentary look of vexation on Maud's face, when he gave her the letter, and the explanation which she had tendered, an explanation which then had seemed so perfectly satisfactory. Putting one thing with another, now, however, it seemed to afford some possible clue to this mystery, though so slight as probably to break in the unravelling. How should he follow it up? He tried to remember the address, stamped in blue upon the back of the envelope, but he could not. The only thing he felt nearly sure of was that the post-town was *Salisbury*. Now, in Salisbury lived the old aunt of whom mention has been already made.

Sitting in his little study that evening, with the notes of the morrow's sermon before him, he found his thoughts rebelliously wandering, do what he would, until he started up with a sudden resolution.

"It is no use going on like this—I will go to Bristol on Monday. I have not been absent for more than a year. The vicar cannot refuse me three or four days. . . . See Mary, and learn from her exactly when, and what she wrote to Miss Pomeroy, also

whether she knows anything of that letter which Miss Pomeroy said was from a lady engaging Mary's services. . . . If I can gain no satisfactory information, then I will go on to Salisbury, to my aunt's, and see what I can do there. Anyhow, I believe it is better for me than remaining here, doing nothing."

After this, he was able to turn to his sermon, and to perform his duty the following day with more concentration of mind. He said nothing, either to Lady Herriesson or to any one else of his object: he simply notified to the rector that he had urgent reasons for wishing to absent himself for some days; undertaking to be back, at latest, on the following Saturday. And early on Monday morning he set out.

At Bristol he met with a disappointment which might almost have been foreseen. The newly-married couple were away, at Weston-super-Mare: they would not be back till the Wednesday: so John made up his mind to follow them. He did not reach Weston till so late, however, that he thought it best to delay seeing Mary till the next morning; when he found her all smiles, and blushing red roses at the unexpected sight of the curate on the beach.

In less than ten minutes he had gained the information he needed. Mary had never heard of a situation : there never had been any question of one, between Miss Pomeroy and herself. She had written to the young lady to announce her engagement, and had received a kind letter in reply, which she was able to show John Miles—its date being of importance—and then she had heard no more, until the few lines came, enclosing the letter to Lady Herriesson. This Mary had posted, as she was desired, and would have preserved a strict silence on the subject but for the curate's urgent and searching inquiries. She could not resist them. The Reverend John Miles had been the girl's second conscience for the last four years. When she came to learn that her dear young mistress was missing, and the anxiety that prevailed on her account, she told him at once all she knew. It was little enough : and yet sufficient to strengthen the growing suspicion in John's mind. The cover of this letter (without date) Mary had not kept ; but she had had the curiosity to examine the postmark, and she felt very certain it was Salisbury.

Here, then, were the facts John had elicited. First, that two days prior to the one on which she

told him that Mary had found a situation, Maud had received and answered the girl's letter which announced her marriage. Consequently, there could not be a doubt that Maud had purposely deceived him. What had been her object? Secondly, the letter which came from Salisbury, and was directed to M. H., was clearly not meant for Mary Hind. Thirdly, Miss Pomeroy's lines, enclosing the letter to her mother, which she had sent to Bristol, evidently to avoid being traced by the postmark, had come also from Salisbury. John Miles had no longer any doubt that somewhere in the neighbourhood of Salisbury she was to be found. And, moreover, a suspicion of the truth, or of something very like it, was now taking possession of his mind. He knew Maud's character: he knew that nothing was more likely than that, when she had fled from her stepfather's house, it should have been with the determination to work for her own bread, and no longer to eat the bread of idleness. And he began to perceive how his certificate to Mary Hind's character might have been turned to account. If resolved to support herself by entering service in any capacity whatsoever, Miss Pomeroy would certainly do so under an assumed

name. It seemed very probable to Miles, as he thought the matter over in the 'train, that she should have adopted that of her former maid. At all events, having such very slight materials to guide his inquiries, he made up his mind that they should, in the first instance, take this direction.

John's aunt lived in the Close at Salisbury. Mrs. Hicks was a widow of independent means, an excellent, charitable woman—charitable in the highest sense of the term—who, though she had lived out of the world all her life, possessed the rare virtue of indulgence to the weaknesses of those who have been otherwise tried than herself. The dangers that beset beauty, brilliant talents, rank and wealth—these had never been hers: she had had her share of difficulty and sorrow, no doubt; but her troubles had not hardened the ground whereon they had fallen, like the frost, but had rather softened it, like the dew, to receive and nourish the good seed dropped there. She was now very infirm, and had had one or two serious attacks within the last few years, which had left her in a condition requiring the greatest care and watchfulness. Her old maid-servant, Martha, a good, kindly soul, was not much

fitted for any service requiring prevision, suggestion, or indeed any departure from the narrow treadmill of duties which she had faithfully performed for years. She was a humble-minded woman, revering her mistress (as, indeed, did all the servants), and affording as great a contrast to Mrs. Rouse, in all ways, as could be met with in the county of Wilts. Mrs. Hicks was much attached to John, and had the highest opinion of him, and by many he was looked upon as her heir; but, as the deceased Hicks had left several nephews, it was doubtful whether the widow's sense of justice would permit her to endow her own kith with the fortune left her by her husband. However this might be, she always bade John consider her house as his home; and whenever he afforded himself a holiday it was hither he came.

It had not been possible for him to announce his coming; and when he drove up late on Tuesday evening to the little gabled house in the Close, his arrival was the pleasantest of surprises to the old lady. He had made up his mind to tell her everything, as, indeed, under the circumstances, he could hardly avoid doing. Besides, her long knowledge of the neighbourhood might materially assist his in-

quiries. She heard, of course, with astonishment a narration so far removed from all her experience, and she was shocked by it: but the feeling uppermost in her mind was one of pity for the unhappy girl who had been led to take this extraordinary step.

“How much the poor young woman must have suffered, my dear John, before she could have brought herself to do such a thing! . . . And so you have no other clue than that the postmark was ‘Salisbury’?”

“None. I think, if I were to see the name of the place, I might know it. And, perhaps, I might recognise the writing. At least, I remember its striking me as peculiar—like what I imagine foreign hands to be—fine and cramped; but then, no doubt, every foreign governess writes a hand of that sort, so that is not much clue. . . . I will go to the post-office in the morning, and get them to give me a list of the places near this that send their letters into Salisbury. I will also speak to the police, and see if they can help me; but it is rather working in the dark.”

The inspector proved to be a remarkably intelligent man. The whole of the next day was occupied in

prosecuting inquiries in different directions. John had obtained an accurate description of Maud's dress.

"You expect the young lady has gone into service, sir? If so, it is probable she will have got rid of her clothes. We'll go round to the slop-shops and find out if any things of the sort described here have been sold there within the last few weeks. . . . If we find them, we are sure we are on the right track, at all events. Then about the post, sir; if they've any observation at all, they ought to know such a hand as you describe, coupled with the name on the cover. There ain't so many bags from the neighbouring houses and villages, after all."

The inspector's efforts were crowned with success. John accompanied him to the shop where the woman distinctly remembered the circumstance of Maud's coming there early one morning about a month back, and selling the only costly garments upon her, while she bought others of a simple kind, together with a bag full of linen which had been carried for her to the station by the shop-boy. The lad, being questioned, could not tell for what station the young woman had taken a ticket, nor were porters or

station-master able to throw any light on the subject; but here the post-office stepped in. Out of all the houses whose bags were sent direct to the Salisbury office, a certain number only were on this line of rail. Their names were submitted to John: he selected, after some hesitation, four or five, and among these Beckworth House happened to be the only one that sent out envelopes stamped in blue on the back. After this, the description of Mrs. Cartaret's handwriting, which was well known at the post, removed any further doubt; and the information, furnished by those tradesmen who served her, as to the constant changes that took place in her maids, pointed at once to the direction which John's search must first take. Early the following morning he put himself into the train for Beckworth; and, after an interview with the station-master, who not only remembered the fact of Maud's arrival, but, being a friend of Mr. Dapper's, had heard that gentleman's jealous sneers touching his master's admiration for the young woman, and the "pretty way" in which they "carried it on" together—after obtaining, in short, more information than he had bargained for, John Miles walked slowly up to the

house, heavy at heart, awkward, and ill-at-ease. Now, that the difficulties of his undertaking were apparently overcome, he felt that they were, in reality, only beginning. What should he say to the sheep who had wandered from his fold?

CHAPTER XI.

“COME! off with you, young man!” cried Mrs. Rouse, taking a rapid survey of the stranger, from the crown of his soaked hat, over a well-splashed “Inverness,” down to the muddy boots that encased his huge feet. “Don’t be a-bringing of your dirt in here. We don’t allow no followers. We’ve trouble enough with Mary Hind, without *that*.”

“May I speak with you a minute, ma’am? I am the clergyman of her parish, through whose recommendation—I believe—she got this place.”

“Oh! is that it? Well, I beg your pardon, sir—I didn’t—please to walk this way. I can’t say as the young woman’s much credit to the parish. I’m just worried out o’ my life by her. I wish to goodness,” she continued, as they reached the house-keeper’s room, and she shut the door, “I wish to

goodness she had never set her foot here; and—meaning no disrespect to you, sir—I can't say as she's a bit fit for service, though she may have done well enough in your school. But we don't want no schollards here," added Mrs. Rouse, with a lively sense of the injury which Maud's accomplishments in this line had wrought.

"I can quite understand—I am afraid that she made a mistake in entering service," said Miles; (and had he been the oldest diplomatist, he could have said nothing better calculated to mollify Mrs. Rouse). "It is to try and induce her to return to her friends that I am come here."

"You'll find it precious hard work I expect, sir, but I only hope you'll succeed. The girl is an artful hussy, that's what she is, sir, who turns all the men's heads, and the sooner she's packed off, the better. If I'd had *my* way, she'd ha' been off before now, in double-quick time; but Mrs. Cartaret is that taken with her parleyvousing, she can't see the plain truth, nor won't, till it's too late—that's my belief."

"You are mistaken," said John, hurriedly, and he felt himself colouring, as she spoke, which made him worse. "The girl is not what you believe her

to be. She is not artful: believe me—I know her well. But you cannot be more anxious than I am that she should quit a situation for which—she is altogether unfit.”

“Then, may I be so bold as to ask why you recommended her, sir?” said Mrs. Rouse, sharply; and she enjoyed the triumph of witnessing the curate’s inability to parry this home-thrust. He fidgeted about on the black horsehair chair, and looked uncomfortable. Then, with a sort of sublime pity, she continued: “But Lor’ bless you, sir, I don’t blame you. How was *you* to know? I suppose, now, you thought in the school that butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth? She’s not a young woman, now, as you’d expect to be encouraging a young gentleman, as his intentions can’t, in course, be honourable—a-kissing in passages, and a-carrying on shameful—you wouldn’t expect it? No: but you mark my words, she is up to a little game here, sir, as you’ll find she’ll not readily give up. If she *do*, I’ll give you leave to say she is not artful, and call me a fool into the bargain.”

John Miles was certainly not a man to take on trust anything a woman like Mrs. Rouse might in-

sinuate. He was indignant at the woman's vulgar malignity, which it was not difficult to surmise had its root in jealousy; and he would ask for no explanation of her words. But, nevertheless, could such things as he had heard at the station, and now again from Mrs. Rouse, could such things be said without some foundation? It was scandal; but what could have given rise to such scandal? He felt perplexed. Mrs. Rouse, in the meantime, was examining his nose, and speculating whether he drank.

"Will you tell her that I am here?" he said, quietly, at last. "I hope to prove to you that you are wrong. I have very little doubt that, after a short conversation with me, Mary Hind will see the advisability of returning to her friends."

Ten minutes later Maud entered the room. She looked pale and worn; but there was a hard, set look about the mouth which told of struggle and resolution. The first shock of finding herself tracked (and by Miles, too, of all men!) had unnerved her. She had sat down with her head between her hands, after Mrs. Rouse had left the room, and had thought how she should meet him; what she should say; above all, what she should *do*. And then, at last, she had

risen, and like a hunted stag brought to bay, had turned to face her pursuer.

Mrs. Rouse, in the meantime, resorted to one of those expedients for obtaining an exact knowledge of what passed in the interview between Mary Hind and the red-nosed parson, which she probably defended at the bar of her own conscience, upon the principle of "the end justifying the means." In the still-room, which adjoined the housekeeper's room, where Miles was now waiting, was a deep cupboard, the back of which had been a door, communicating between the two rooms, across which shelves had been nailed. When the cupboard-door stood open, therefore, everything that passed in the housekeeper's room could be most distinctly heard; and Mrs. Rouse, cognisant of this fact, always jealously kept it locked. Upon this occasion, after locking herself into the still-room, she noiselessly applied a key from the bunch at her side to the cupboard lock, and having opened it, she posted herself so that no word of what followed escaped her.

Miles came forward quickly, and took Maud's hand. He was more moved than she was, and could not speak for a moment or two; it was she who began

“How did you trace me? And why? It would have been kinder not to do so. What is the use of it? I am resolved not to go back to the house of my stepmother’s husband.”

“Miss Pomeroy, I have no right to inquire what causes led to your leaving it, but——”

“But I wish you to know them. I left it because my life, which had long been miserable, became insupportable when I refused to exchange it for a yet worse slavery. You know something of that, Mr. Miles. The taunts to which I was subjected, drove me to take the step I did, one which I don’t in the least regret, one from which I will not go back. I prefer working for my bread, even as a menial, to being dependent on the charity of a man who was at no pains to conceal that I was a burden on him. Now, Mr. Miles, you know all.”

John had by this time completely recovered his self-possession. He spoke earnestly, almost sternly, and became ennobled, as he always did, when carried away by the sheer force of the words he held himself bound to utter.

“Who placed you in that position? Was it your own act? Do you remember our conversation on the

subject of duty? You have abandoned yours. You have left that state of life to which you were called, to embrace one with other duties which were never meant for you. And the manner in which you have done this is utterly unjustifiable."

"What duties did I abandon? Who wanted me? Their sole object, as I told you long ago, was to get rid of me. They would have been too glad had I run away with any man of five thousand a year. But because I ran away to earn my own bread, and because I am resolved to continue working, their pride will suffer. That is all."

"Even admitting what you say to be true (though I believe Lady Herriesson has suffered much on your account), it does not affect the question. We have a duty to our own conscience which can never depend on the conduct of others."

"I have done nothing my conscience reproaches me with," she said, doggedly.

"Then if you maintain that you are justified in taking this step," he continued, "why all this concealment? Why cause Lady Herriesson so much unnecessary anxiety?"

"Because it was useless to wound her pride, and

create a disturbance by announcing my determination of earning my own bread. I wrote to let her know I was well and happy, which was more than I could have done had I been the wife of Mr. Durborough, as she wished."

"And was it true, Miss Pomeroy? I doubt it. You look far from well, and I cannot believe that you are happy in a position, among a set of people so utterly unlike anything you have been used to, and who regard you with mistrust. Is not this true? I gather it from what that vulgar woman said to me just now."

"What did she say?" asked Maud, quickly, looking up into his face.

"She seemed to be very anxious you should go."

"I shall not go—I shall not go, if it depends upon me. I may be driven away, of course, if you insist on telling my stepmother where I am; but——"

"Be advised, Miss Pomeroy, and avoid all the pain and scandal of an explanation in this house, by quietly leaving at once. I will see Mrs. Cartaret, and take the odium of this upon myself."

"And where should I go? For return to Mortlands I never will."

“As a temporary measure, I propose that you should take refuge with an old aunt of mine at Salisbury, who will receive you as a mother. You can write to Lady Herriesson from there; you can discuss your future plans, and nothing need ever be known of your having been in service. Believe me, this is the wisest course now to retrieve the past.”

She shook her head. “I do not wish to retrieve the past, as you call it. No, Mr. Miles, I am grateful to you for all your interest in me, and I daresay you are right. Perhaps it would be the wisest course, but I can't pursue it for all that. I cannot leave this house unless I am compelled.”

“But this is sheer madness. Why create an unnecessary scandal? Of course, I *must* let your mother know where you are. If Sir Andrew come down here, and has an interview with Mrs. Cartaret, a distressing, and to you most humiliating, scene must follow. Why not avoid this while there is yet time?”

“Because, if you must know the truth, I have promised. I have given my word that, for a certain time, nothing should induce me to leave Mrs. Cartaret of my own free will.”

He looked at her for a moment with a pained wonderment, and began fiddling with the pens on the table.

“You mean that you made such a promise to Mrs. Cartaret? Leave me to explain——”

“It is not to Mrs. Cartaret I made the promise.”

“To whom, then?” Here he split a pen in two.

“That you must excuse my saying. It is enough that, whether rightly or wrongly, I have made such a promise. I am sure you are the last person who would have me break it.”

Poor John felt as if a dagger had been driven into him, somewhere near his heart. To whom could the girl have made such a promise? To whom but to the man Mrs. Rouse had alluded to, and whose name Miles had heard, as common gossip at the railway station, coupled with Maud's? The station-master's words and the housekeeper's yet coarser insinuations, like horrid phantoms, which no force of reason will dismiss, had haunted him ever since, and now they rose up stronger and blacker, allying themselves to Maud's vague avowal in his distressing perplexity. He wiped the cold perspiration from his brow, as he stood there, leaning one clumsy hand on

the green-baize cloth of the table in the centre of the room, shuffling about with his feet, and looking into her face with such piteous anxiety as must have touched her, but that her eyes were turned towards the window. Throughout the interview, indeed, it was notable how Maud, unlike her old, fearless self, seemed to avoid meeting Miles's gaze. Once or twice she turned suddenly towards him, and their eyes flashed, as it were : otherwise she kept hers doggedly fixed upon the laurels outside the window. She sat, with her arms folded, and never changed her position. Miles stood during the whole interview.

“ Miss Pomeroy,” he said, in a husky voice, at last, “ does the person to whom you made such a promise know the truth ? Is it possible that he, or she, should hold you to it, if the simple facts of your false position here are made known ? No one with a grain of right feeling could wish you to remain here under the circumstances.”

“ Listen to me, Mr. Miles. I have already told you I don't want to leave this place. You think it impossible I should be happy here, in what you call my ' false position.' You do not remember how wretched I was before I came here. In spite of

some drawbacks, I—I have been happier here than I have ever been before. The servants' jealousy and vulgarity are but small evils compared with the great kindness I have met with from Mrs. Cartaret. I feel that I am of real use to her. I never felt in the course of my life that I was of any use to any one before. I was very nearly going yesterday, but—but I consented to stay, and now I *must* stay. If it depends upon myself, Mr. Miles, I cannot leave her. And if you are kind, you will keep my secret, and let me fight my own way."

He walked to the window and then to the mantel-piece: he took up his hat and set it down again: he could not remain still; and Maud's eyes, unconsciously, kept following the large islands which his muddy boots left upon Mrs. Rouse's carpet. Suddenly he stopped opposite to her.

"Miss Pomeroy, what you ask is quite impossible. Forgive me, but I must speak out. As clergyman of your parish, it would be sinful in me to let any false delicacy prevent my doing so. By pursuing the course you seem bent upon, you are incurring a great danger; you are imperilling that which is a woman's most precious possession—your reputation."

She started up, her cheeks suddenly a-flame, and looked at him indignantly, without speaking. He went on at once: "That woman knows my object in coming here, and she predicted that I should find you resolute. I will not insult you by a repetition of what she said. It is enough that your persistence in remaining will be misconstrued. If you will not save yourself, therefore, by leaving this at once, quietly and without explanation, as can easily be managed, I must save you in spite of yourself. I must tell Mrs. Cartaret all."

"No," said Maud, passionately. "I will not have it. She will imagine—never mind what. If you choose to go and tell Sir Andrew, you can, it may be your duty, and by to-night's post I will write to him myself, and say that nothing will ever induce me to return to his house, and therefore he had better leave me in peace. That may be your duty, I repeat, but it certainly cannot be your duty to interfere with me, here, and I must insist upon your not speaking to Mrs. Cartaret."

"I think you forget by what means you obtained this situation?" said John, speaking very slowly. "I have clearly a right to tell Mrs. Cartaret that the

certificate she received in my handwriting had no reference to the person who entered her service."

Maud covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. At the same instant the door opened, and Mrs. Cartaret entered. The housekeeper, afraid that her clerical bird would escape without matters coming to a crisis, had only waited to hear Maud's reiterated declaration that she could not leave Beckworth by reason of her promise to some one, and had then hastened up to her mistress, breathless, bursting with impatience to communicate as much as she could understand of what she had overheard, and almost incoherent in the attempt to do so. The girl turned out to be some sort of lady, who had done something dreadful somewhere, and had run away, and come here under a false name, and was clearly no better than she should be. What had Mrs. Rouse always said? Now, it turned out that the creature couldn't and wouldn't leave the house because she had promised Mr. Lowndes to stay! This last shaft carried home. What? La misérable had said that? Had confessed that she had made a promise to mon fils? that she had a secret understanding with him? Ah! mais c'est un peu trop fort! She must see to

this. And, regardless of her dressing-gown and slippers, she threw a shawl over her grey hair, and ran down-stairs. As she turned the handle of the door she caught Miles's last words.

"What does this mean?" she cried, in her high treble, walking straight up to the speaker, and fixing her bright black eyes upon him. "What does all this mean, sir? Who is this young woman? She comes to me with a false character, does she? Who is she, sir?"

"She will tell you herself, madam," murmured the curate, feeling that the avowal would come better thus.

"Mrs. Cartaret"—Maud brushed the hot tears away, and strove to speak calmly, as she turned towards the excited old lady—"Mrs. Cartaret, I see you already know the worst, all that you can possibly care to know. It little matters who I am. I am not what you have believed me to be. I deceived you, for I had no other means of getting a situation; but what Mr. Miles said of Mary Hind I believe he would say of me. He is our curate; question him. I will not return home; nothing shall induce me. If I leave you it will be to go to London, and work

for a living there. Will you cast me off, Mrs. Cartaret? You have been most kind; I never can forget your kindness. Will you not forgive me, now?"

"Forgive you? Only hear her! Listen to the impudence of the coquine! A false character—une fille qui court les aventures—who tries to entrap my son—a regular intriguante—and she asks me to forgive her! Kind? I was kind, because I thought you to be an honest girl, above deception, and I find you are as rusée as an old actress. I see now our little affair of yesterday with wide-open eyes. What! You promise monsieur mon fils not to go away, do you? And you come, with a fine indignation, to declare to me you must leave the house at once. And I am such a sottise that I do not see through it all. I would not believe my good Rouse. But enough of this. I will not listen to another word. Come, pack up your clothes, and be off, and you, sir, let me have a few words with you in private. This way." And the old lady, trembling with anger, turned towards the door. Maud stood there motionless, as if turned to stone. The bitter humiliation of that moment may surely have atoned for many of the mistakes of her life,

poor girl ! To her proud nature a sorer chastisement could hardly have been devised.

“ I have a fly here. Be ready in a quarter of an hour if you can, and we shall save the down train,” said Miles, gently, as he followed Mrs. Cartaret from the room.

What passed in that interview between the curate and the incensed old lady need not be recorded. It is sufficient to say that he sought in vain to mitigate the vehemence of her resentment against Maud. Mrs. Cartaret’s suspicions being now not only aroused, but confirmed beyond the possibility of doubt, the sense of her son’s danger made her pitiless to the girl, whose unhappiness had driven her to seek for an independence by means which John Miles could not attempt to justify. She would sooner have pardoned a peasant’s daughter; but a young lady ! to run away from home and enter service, and by a false character, too ! It shocked all her fine old notions of a gentlewoman, in the first place ; in the second, she was far too sharp not to perceive that if Lowndes’s infatuation should unhappily prove to be lasting, the girl’s birth would prove a powerful weapon in his hands. She was too much irritated to take a dis-

passionate view of the case. She heard all that Miles had to say, but she shook her head incredulously when he tried to convince her that the estimate she had formed of Maud's character was utterly false, and she declined seeing her again.

“Look you, my good sir, it is of no use to say that I forgive her, because I do not. Take her home to her friends, and never let me hear of her again, if possible. Religion? Christian forgiveness? Ta-ta! That is all very well, but forgiveness does not cast out devils; and this one has made so much mischief here, and I had grown so fond of her, that I require all my force to cast her out. You see me in a rage, sir. Yes; because she made me her dupe. There, say no more about it. Pour l'amour de Dieu, let us hear no more about her!”

And so, poor girl, she went her way, her proud spirit wounded, her heart full to bursting, and with a grievous sense of injustice, against which, nevertheless, she had deprived herself of all right to complain. Not yet a month had passed since she first crossed the threshold of Beckworth, and how eventful had those weeks proved to her!

Their short journey to Salisbury was performed

in absolute silence. She offered no resistance
to her plan that she should go to his aunt's for
the time being. All places were alike to her; it was
a matter of indifference now where she went, provided
she did not return to Mortlands.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was not a more miserable man in London than Lowndes Cartaret in those days. It was on the Wednesday night that he got to town, trying vainly, for the first time in his life, to shake off a dead weight that lay at his heart, and to turn his thoughts from the one object upon which they were obstinately fixed. He went to Brookes's; there had been a late debate going on, and all the men he met were eagerly discussing it: he could scarcely affect a languid interest in what they said. Then he turned into "Pratt's," eat a morose sandwich, and smoked a gloomy cigar; heard the various merits of Filibuster and Merry Andrew canvassed, and their respective chances of winning the Derby; tried to play a game of billiards, and missed nearly every ball; listened with a cynical smile to that capital

(though scandalous) story about young A. and Lady B., which made every other man in the room roar ; and, finally, got to bed, but not to sleep, about four in the morning.

The next day he played a set of melancholy variations upon the same tune. He sat for an hour with one of the prettiest women in London, whose conversation, moreover, possessed the spice and sparkle of champagne-cup. He came away, declaring that she was as dull as ditch-water. He sauntered down to Tattersall's ; he took a turn in the Row : and all the apples at which he bit were dust and ashes ! At night a friend who had a box at the Haymarket asked him to come there, and to join a supper with some actresses afterwards. Lowndes was so visibly bored during the play that he infected the man he was with, and said so many sarcastic and disagreeable things during supper, that the ladies were unanimous in wishing that he had not been of the party. After another sleepless night, a night during which he thought over all that Maud had ever said to him about his unprofitable existence, and the despicable folly of utter idleness, he rose with the resolution of seeking other and better means of occupying his

thoughts, if possible. He walked to Chesham Place, where his cousin, the Minister, lived; a man who, for certain reasons of gratitude, had shown the strongest desire to serve him, but whose good offices Lowndes had always declined. The great man had just finished breakfast, and was in his study, reading, with that callousness which long use produces, an abusive article upon himself in one of the morning papers. He raised his eyebrows as he laid down the paper, and held out his hand.

“Why, what brings you out at this unusual hour, Lowndes? I did not know you were in town. How is your mother?”

“Very well, thank you. I wanted to talk to you, so I came early. You won't believe me, I daresay; but I'm sick of doing nothing. Sudden change, isn't it? Like the rest of my friends, you have always been at me for being so lazy. Well, at last I have begun to see, myself, that it's a mistake. I don't know that I am good for much, but I am come to tell you that if you can find me anything to do, I'll do it. It can't be harder work than trying to kill time when one feels confoundedly bored—that's certain.”

The Minister, whilst expressing his satisfaction at

the change in his cousin's views, reminded Lowndes that appointments of any kind did "not grow on gooseberry-bushes;" that the press and the public now exercised a sharp look-out for all such as were not justified by merit; and, lastly, that he had no immediate prospect of anything falling into his gift. But he promised not to be unmindful of Lowndes's wishes, and he exhorted him, in the meanwhile, to employ his time in studying, with a solicitor, common law, a knowledge of which must, in any calling, be a valuable acquisition. And then, a special messenger being announced, he shook Lowndes's hand and dismissed him.

The important place that trivial accidents hold in life is a truth of which each man's experience must afford numberless examples. In leaving Beckworth suddenly, as he did, Lowndes had found it expedient to leave his valet behind him. That individual had received the order to "pack portmanteaux" instantly with consternation, consequent, as he explained, upon the fact that half his master's linen was at the wash! He was ordered, therefore, to follow Lowndes as soon as this could be recovered; and by the first train on Friday he appeared, charged not alone with

clean shirts, but with the strange tidings which had disturbed the whole Beckworth household on the previous day. But for this, it is very certain that Lowndes would not have heard of the discovery touching Maud, and of her departure, for some weeks. Mrs. Cartaret would naturally have abstained from all allusion to her in writing to her son ; and, not until his next visit (which he had resolved should not be for a month at least) would he have known the truth. And then, if his mother had kept her own counsel, all clue by which to trace the girl would have been lost.

Everything is known, everything discussed in the servants' hall, and Lowndes's valet, being perfectly aware of the particular interest which his master took in the young person, a garbled version of whose story had excited so much curiosity when it penetrated to the lower regions at Beckworth, lost no time in informing Mr. Cartaret of what had occurred twelve hours after the latter had left home. It was, as I have said, a garbled version ; still, there was the main outline. Mary Hind was not Mary Hind, but a gentleman's daughter, who had run away from home ; and the parson of the parish had come after her, and

had carried her back with him. This was all that Lowndes retained ; he cleared the tale of its superincumbent rubbish, and held fast by these facts. He put himself into the five-o'clock train, and reached Beckworth, just as his mother was going to bed, that night.

She guessed at once why he was come, and looked somewhat aghast.

“ Tell me the truth of all this, mother. It is of no use any longer beating about the bush—where is Mary Hind gone ? ”

“ What is that to you, Lowndes ? ” said the old lady, taking courage “ with both hands ” as she would herself have said.

“ After what happened on Tuesday night, I have a right to know whether she left Beckworth of her own free will, or not.”

“ Because she promised you to remain, hein ? La coquine ! Well, then ; she did not leave it of her own free will. She left it because I turned her out—there ! ”

“ Where is she gone ? I ask you again.”

“ Ca ne vous regarde pas.”

“ It is so much my business that I won't rest till I have found out.”

“Allez au diable!” cried the old lady, violently thumping the sofa with her little fist. “What do you mean by all this? Do you think I am going to encourage your intrigues, sir? Go, find out as you can. I will tell you nothing.”

“You have no right to use that word about the girl, and you know it as well as I do, mother. Look here. I will be quite open with you. I love this girl. For the first time in my life I know what love is. I left Beckworth on Wednesday because Mary asked me to do so; and because I resolved to give myself a fair trial, to see if absence would make any change in my feelings, and but for this discovery I should have remained away for some time. Now that I find she is gone, I am determined to learn who she is, and what has become of her. Tell me all you know, and I will pledge you my word that, when I have discovered her, I will wait—I will test my feelings by time before I speak to her again. She is a lady by birth; so much I know. It is of very little consequence to me, but to you, with your ideas, of course it makes a great difference, and ——”

“It makes no difference at all!” interrupted Mrs. Cartaret, vehemently, “A lady! ma foi! a

girl who runs away from home, qui court les aventures, who has no name; who has been advertised and made the gossip of the county,—don't talk to me of it, Lowndes! Tenez, mon fils, ça me porte le sang à la tête!”

“What county has she been made the gossip of?” asked Lowndes, regardless of the rest of his mother's tirade.

“What do I know?” replied the old lady, sharply. “I only know that she comes here with her false character, and that the curé finds her out, and follows her, and that she has gone away, and I hope never to hear her name again—voilà!”

“So they advertised for her, did they?”

“Yes, in *The Times*—a pretty disgrace! If I was her father I would lock her up, and horsewhip her—la coquine!”

“Who is her father? Come, mother, you may as well tell me, for I shall find out, somehow or other.”

“I shall tell you nothing, misérable que tu es! What! you will follow this creature—this girl who introduces herself into houses under false names? You, who might marry the heiress of Marly-les-

Bois—a charming, innocent girl, who has never yet left the ‘Sacré Cœur’—and you prefer to her this—this—aventurière—this disreputable ——”

“There, mother, that is enough. She is as straightforward and pure-minded a girl as ever lived; she never encouraged my passion in the smallest degree; on the contrary, she has nothing of the adventuress about her—and I think I know the class pretty well. I am confident she had some very strong provocation before she took the strange step which brought her here; and I feel certain that you will one day be sorry for having spoken of her as you have done. As to your ‘Sacré Cœur,’ I have known one or two remarkably queer ladies who were educated there, and ——”

“Ah! now he is going to talk against religion! He is going to talk scandal of the convents! It wanted but that—ah!”

“No, I mean no disrespect against the convents. I only mean this: that I prefer a woman I know, a character that is formed, to the sheet of white paper upon which God knows what may be written by-and-by. And now, mother, good-night. As you are determined to tell me nothing, we had better say no

more on the subject. It only irritates you, and it does me no good."

He left the room ; and when Mrs. Rouse brought up her mistress's chocolate the next morning, she informed the unhappy old lady—who had lain awake half the night devising means (poor innocent soul !) by which she might divert her son from the right track—that Mr. Lowndes had been gone two hours.

On leaving his mother's room the previous night, he had sent for the file of *The Times*, and had experienced no difficulty in finding the advertisement which had reference to Maud. In it, any person having information respecting the missing young lady, was requested to communicate with a certain solicitor in London. To London, therefore, Lowndes must return by the first train in the morning. It was Saturday, and if he did not see the solicitor early, his office would be closed, and two whole days would be lost. First, however, sorely against his inclination, he thought it expedient to question Dapper, and all the men in the stables. He learnt very little : a fly from the station had brought the clergyman and had taken him and the "young

person" back; and the train they meant to catch was evidently the one-o'clock "down." At the station he gained one other fact: their tickets had been taken for Salisbury. But as there is a junction there, and two distinct companies, this did not insure the travellers having gone no further. He thought it more prudent, therefore, to hold by his original plan of going to London, if only for a few hours. He could return to Salisbury by the evening mail, if he failed in obtaining the information he wanted.

This early train brought him to London by eleven o'clock, and before noon he was in the solicitor's office. He sent in his card, and was admitted at once. The lawyer rose, and advanced with extreme urbanity.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Cartaret. I knew your uncle very well, and have often been at Beckworth, in former days. Pray take a chair. What is there I can do for you?"

It was a great piece of good luck: the way was thus unexpectedly smoothed for Lowndes. He drew the advertisement from his pocket.

“ I am come to speak to you about this. Have you yet received any information touching the person whom it concerns ? ”

“ Why, bless my soul !——” The lawyer stopped short, and looked sharply at the young man over his spectacles. “ No, Mr. Cartaret, we have not—what do you know about her ? ”

“ Wait a minute. I will tell you ; but I must make it a condition that you first tell me who she is, and where her people live. I think, as you know something of us, you will trust to the honour of a Cartaret to keep this a profound secret, if you require it. But the circumstances of the case are so peculiar, that I do not choose to say anything unless I am made acquainted with the young lady’s antecedents.”

“ Well,” said the solicitor, after a moment’s pause. “ I see no reason why I should not tell you. The whole of the neighbourhood has been full of the scandal for the last month, and, as you say, sir, I am sure I can trust to the honour of a Cartaret to turn this information to no ill purpose. The young lady is Miss Pomeroy. She is step-daughter to Sir Andrew Herriesson, and left Mort-

lands, Sir Andrew's place, it is supposed, with some romantic idea of supporting herself, and being no longer a burden on her stepfather. At least it is tolerably certain that she went away alone, and that love, at all events, had nothing to say to this extraordinary step."

"Pardon me an instant. Do you know anything of the curate of the parish?"

"No. Why? He was questioned, I remember, as being almost the only person with whom Miss Pomeroy was on terms of any intimacy, and it is greatly in consequence of what he said, that we have been led to the conclusion that Miss Pomeroy had conceived a morbid repugnance to continuing to be dependent on Sir Andrew. It appears that she had refused a magnificent offer of marriage only a few days previously. She is a peculiar character, with unusual ideas upon most subjects, for a young lady, I apprehend."

It was now Lowndes's turn to give the narrative of Mary Hind's entering his mother's service, and of her sojourn at Beckworth. He did this succinctly, making, of course, no allusion to his own feelings, nor to his conduct, which had so justly incensed her

as to have very nearly driven her from the house the day prior to the curate's arrival.

“And now, look here. How comes it that if he took her home—that was on Thursday—you should not have had notice of the fact before this? To say nothing of a telegram, which they would surely have sent, there have been two posts. Doesn't it strike you as very extraordinary?”

“I doubt whether she would go home; but I cannot make it out. This Mr. Miles would surely have communicated with them ——” He reflected for a minute, and looked at his watch. “I will tell you what: we close at two to-day, and to-morrow is Sunday. Do you care to prosecute this inquiry any further? If so, we will start together by the three-o'clock train, Mr. Cartaret. We shall be at Scornton by nine, and might get on to Mortlands to-night. What say you, sir?”

The two men started by the three-o'clock train.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN watching the course of very quiet lives one is sometimes struck by seeing how events crowd themselves into a marvellously short space of time. John Miles's life had been one of as uninterrupted calm as any man's; and now, suddenly, incidents of vital interest succeeded each other rapidly. During that silent half hour to Salisbury, he had resolved on his line of action. He would deliver up Miss Pomeroy into Mrs. Hicks's charge: he would then speak certain words which he felt must get themselves said before he could leave her; and, after that, he would start on his homeward journey, to inform Lady Herriesson of the discovery and safety of her errant stepdaughter.

Fate willed it otherwise. On driving up to the

door of the small gabled house in the Close, Martha ran out with a troubled face.

“ I’m glad you’re a-come back, Mister John. I’ve been a-watching for you. Missis has been took ill. We have all been fine and frightened. She had a seizure about an hour after you left. I thought it was all up with her, Mister John, but she rallied. The doctor—he has been with her ever since, and says that she’ll do now, if she don’t have another attack. Will you please to walk up-stairs, and see her, sir ? ”

The old lady was quite conscious, and her eyes smiled when she saw her nephew enter the room. She tried to speak, but was prevented by the doctor, who whispered to John that it was, above all things, essential that she should be kept quiet. “ Anything that excites her may be fatal. She must be most carefully watched for some days. You can remain with her, can you not ? ”

John notified that he could. He need not be at Mortlands until Saturday night, for his Sunday’s duty, and he might manage to return, perhaps, on Monday. In his aunt’s condition, it seemed obvious that he ought to be here, if possible. As to Maud,

he must send off a telegram to Sir Andrew, and write by post a fuller explanation of the circumstances in which Miss Pomeroy was now placed.

Maud sat in the little parlour below stairs, listless ; her hands lying impassive in her lap, her eyes fixed upon the fire. The violent emotions of the morning had left her stunned. She had a dim consciousness of humiliation and anguish, justly entailed by her own conduct ; and felt utterly incapable of looking forward, or of laying out any plan of action for herself. Only one thing—not back to Mortlands ! Her mind kept repeating this with an obstinate desperation. Nothing should drag her there. Martha, wondering “ whoever the young lady can be as Mister John has brought ” to this quiet old house, where all goes on by clockwork from one year’s end to the other, and young ladies have never come to stay before, brings in a luncheon-tray, and Maud eats something mechanically. She hears the doctor descend, and leave the house ; then, after that, for a long time, there is no other sound but the heavy tick-tick of the clock in the hall. It is getting dusk when a shambling step upon the stair tells her that Miles is coming down.

“Miss Pomeroy,” says he, awkwardly enough, and colouring, as he enters, “will you try and make yourself at home here, for a day or two? My aunt’s illness, I hope, will make no difference. Her last words, before I left her this morning, were, ‘Bring Miss Pomeroy, and she shall remain with me as long as she likes.’ I should have returned to Mortlands myself this evening, but for this illness. I am now going to telegraph to Sir Andrew, and write to Lady Herriesson, to announce your safety under this roof.”

She did not think of resisting his proposal that she should remain here. Where, indeed, could she go? She wanted time to collect her ideas; and in what Miles said, there was one thing only which made much impression. To-morrow the Philistines would be upon her!

She went into the adjoining study; and she heard him say to Martha: “I have plenty of time for the post? I shall have done my letter in a quarter of an hour, and whoever goes there, will carry on this message to the telegraph-office. I will not ring, as the bell disturbs Mrs. Hicks, but I will leave both paper and letter in the hall.”

Maud saw him again two or three times that evening, and his visits to the parlour, it must be confessed, far from affording her any comfort, rather irritated her. She knew she ought to feel grateful to Miles, and she did not : she felt, on the contrary, something akin to resentment. He found her sitting under a lamp, a volume of Plutarch's Lives, which she had taken from a shelf, before her. She scarcely raised her eyes when he entered, and her tight-shut mouth seemed to unclose reluctantly to utter such words as were absolutely necessary. When she did glance up, and caught the light glistening upon the prominent feature of the curate's face, it annoyed her. He was wonderfully good with her : so patient and forbearing. But this, I think, only made it worse. She kept comparing his excellencies with the shortcomings of a man whom she certainly could not respect, and who would never be patient or forbearing. Had poor John's character been a little less admirable, she would have liked him, just then, all the better.

Miles was not to be envied : with his old aunt lying, in her precarious state, upstairs, and the girl he worshipped, below, freezing him by her manner

when he approached her. But he said to himself that there were reasons for this; she had been subjected to insult in his presence that day; her own conscience must now be accusing her; lastly, she was in a delicate position in this house—the guest of his aunt, whom she did not even know. These causes, combined, were surely sufficient to account for her manner, without attributing it to that most fatal one, which John tried to dismiss from his mind, as incredible. But he could not quite get rid of what he had heard; no one ever can.

The next day the doctor declared that all immediate anxiety about Mrs. Hicks was over. She was allowed to see Maud for a minute, as she wished it. The old lady held out her hand, and said gently: “I am glad to see you, my dear.”

“You are not to talk, remember,” said John.

“But I want to tell her that——”

“That the longer she stays the better you will be pleased. I have told her so. Sir Andrew will, no doubt, be here presently, and if——”

“We will talk over this by-and-by,” said Maud, quickly. “I am very grateful to Mrs. Hicks for her kindness.”

She stooped, and kissed the old lady's hand. Then, when she had left the room, Mrs. Hicks whispered: "John, I like her face. I understand it all now, my dear. God prosper you! I hope she will stay here until—well, until she gets a better home."

John's face grew purple; and its distressed expression struck the old lady. He said nothing, but sighed, and shook his head; then presently he followed Maud, and tried to get to speak to her. Impossible. She shut herself into her own room, and, by-and-by, slipped out, and wandered about the cathedral and the Close, feeling restless and ill at ease. The crisis was at hand: there must be an explanation with John that night, and a definite resolution, in some shape or other. What could she do?

In the meantime, neither telegram nor messenger arrived from Mortlands. John was at his wit's end to account for this. When dinner-time came, he eat something in his aunt's room, feeling that a *tête-à-tête* meal with Miss Pomeroy might not be agreeable to her under the circumstances; but as soon as it was over, he descended to the parlour. He found her demeanour very different to what it had been on

the previous evening. She held out her hand, and was the first to speak.

“You are going back to Mortlands to-morrow, are you not?”

“Yes, I am; but I cannot understand not having a telegram—nor any notice having been taken of my message. The early post, however, *must* bring you a letter from Lady Herriesson.”

“No, it will not. Neither letter nor telegram were sent. I destroyed both.”

John looked surprised and annoyed. After a moment's pause, he said abruptly: “What was your object, Miss Pomeroy? You must have known that——”

“To gain a few hours. I could decide on nothing yesterday. My brain was in a whirl. The prospect of Sir Andrew's arriving by the first train made me desperate. I went out, taking both letter and message, and told Martha I had done so, but instead of despatching, I destroyed them.”

“You forget that you are placing me in a very awkward position, Miss Pomeroy,” said John, speaking thickly, and turning his face away from her, towards the fire.

“Why so? You are going home to-morrow. It is much better you should tell them everything yourself. You can then explain to Sir Andrew how useless it is to come here, and have a scene. I am resolved not to return to Mortlands.”

“You will remain here, then, if they consent to it?”

“No. I am going to London.”

“To London? What! Who are you going to there?”

“I shall go and train for a hospital-nurse: it is what I am fitted for. I am strong, and haven't sensitive nerves—though I *have* a sensitive pride. I won't try service again, and subject myself to—well, no matter. But I believe I can bear a good deal in other ways, and, at all events, I mean to try.”

“Oh! Miss Pomeroy,” exclaimed John. “Pray think better of this. At all events, whatever you may do by-and-by, pray remain here a little time. Your presence here at this moment is valuable—it is, indeed. I cannot bear to leave my poor aunt solely to the charge of Martha. I must return to my parish work, and it is quite uncertain whether I may be able to come back here just at present. Will

you refuse to do a kind action, and take my place in the sick-room while I am away?"

"I am a stranger to Mrs. Hicks. I should be no sort of comfort to her."

"Indeed you would. She has expressed a great desire for it herself. Martha is an excellent old soul, but a younger face is cheering in a sick-room. If you are bent on hospital training, Miss Pomeroy, try and think it is beginning here."

Maud hesitated. "If I can really be of use, why I will stay for a few days—until your return; but, if so, you must keep Sir Andrew away. . . . When do you think you shall be back?"

He got up, and began nervously poking at the fire, which was quite uncalled for, inasmuch as it was burning brightly; but by this device he turned his back to Maud, and while he shivered a fine block of coal to atoms, he said, with a great effort: "It—shall depend upon you, Miss Pomeroy."

"Upon me? I don't understand you. If your aunt remains ill, you will return as soon as you can, I suppose?"

"I could—I might—perhaps, be back on Monday—if you would say but one word—if you would say

that my presence here is not—not unwelcome to you.”

Did she understand aright? A flush of angry surprise suffused her face. Had he brought her here for this? She had resented his pursuit; she had felt bitterly towards him for destroying her short-lived day-dream; but she had all along looked up to him as the faithful, uncompromising man of God—the apostle of duty. Was he, after all, no better than other men? Had he tracked her, and driven her from Beckworth for this? No; she discarded that unworthy doubt. But his words implied but too plainly that he wished to take advantage of her position, now, to urge a suit which he had never dared to urge before. It put all her woman's nature upon the defensive. She sat there in consternation, unable to utter a word, but feeling very angry. He turned, and took her hand: she withdrew it quickly. He saw the wrathful look in her eyes, and said, in a broken voice: “Forgive my presumption, Miss Pomeroy. But the gulf that has divided us hitherto no longer seemed so impassable. You have fled from a life of luxury, and have embraced a life of work. The drop to being the wife of a poor curate

no longer seemed so great. . . . Listen to me," he continued, his courage rising as he spoke. "I know that there is nothing in me to attract any woman, and that I have nothing to offer you but a deep—God only knows how deep!—and devoted love. No one would ever have known it. It would have died with me, as it has lived in my inmost heart, for more than three years, unspoken, but for this. But now, Maud, that you have cast yourself out upon the world, I cannot remain silent. I believe, yes, I do believe, that I could, in time, make you happy. I do not expect you to love me now; but if I am not utterly repugnant to you, do not cast my love absolutely from you. Believe me, the faithful attachment of even a man like myself is better than a lonely struggle with the world, such as you contemplate. You need active duties, you want to feel yourself of use: yours would be the highest use that is given to woman."

The emotion with which John uttered these words Maud found was infectious. She was moved, in spite of herself, and said, in a softened voice: "I wish you had not spoken thus, Mr. Miles. . . . It was a great pity to disturb our friendly relations

towards each other by—by saying all this. It is such nonsense to fancy that I am the least fit to be a clergyman's wife in the first place, even if— But let us say no more about it, please. It never can be. This is a mistake from first to last. You pitied me at Mortlands, and now that you think I have compromised myself by running away, you offer me a home. I am very grateful to you. . . . I respect you beyond any man I know ; but this can't be."

"Listen to me for one moment more," said John, very earnestly. "Is it for me or for yourself you speak? If it be for me, God knows how little *pity* has to do with my love. I never thought you deserved all the pity you claimed. I thought you often to blame: I saw all your faults, and I loved you, Maud, in spite of them. . . . I tried to crush my folly; I thought I had crushed it till lately. But now, I ask myself, why should I be silent? If you are resolved not to return to Mortlands, will you consent to come and be the light of my humble home—the joy of my life, Maud?"

"I am not made to be 'a light' to any one, certainly to no one so good as you are. . . . Pray, dear Mr. Miles, say no more about this. If you wish

me to remain here, you must promise not to renew the subject. It is the only condition upon which I can stay under your aunt's roof."

No man of the world would have sought to satisfy the cruel doubts which crossed his mind at that moment, by asking a direct question—a question which he had no sort of right to demand. But John was not a man of the world. He buried his face in his hands, then he walked up and down the room, coughed, and stood by the mantelpiece, wiping his forehead, and fidgeting uneasily from one leg to the other. At last he blurted out: "Will you relieve my mind? Did you, or did you not, while in that house, get entangled in any way? . . . You spoke of a *promise*——?"

"I am entangled in no way," said Maud, quickly, and the blood mounted to her cheek. "The promise I spoke of referred to Mrs. Cartaret—to my remaining in her service. Is that enough for you? Pray ask any other question." Then, seeing that he remained silent, she rose, saying, "I think we had both better go to bed. I feel irritable. I suppose I shall see you in the morning? Please remember what I have said. Good-night!"

Thus was poor John reduced to silence.

He left the next morning, somewhat easier in his mind touching the rumours which had disquieted him, and fondly hoping that time might soften Maud's heart, and that she might be brought to think the haven of a curate's cottage better than drifting, rudderless, upon the troubled waters of the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN John Miles reached home on Saturday afternoon, he found that a poor woman in a distant part of the parish lay dying, and had sent more than once to ask for him. 'Liza was much put out at her master's setting off without his dinner, which, as she said, was "just done to a turn," in expectation of his arrival, and would be "all spiled by the time he come back." The joint, however, had time to get cold, and to accrue parsley unto itself before he returned. The poor woman begged him to remain and read to her, and he did so, until all was over. Saddened in spirit, and weary in body, at last he got home shortly before eight, and broke his fast. Then he washed and dressed himself, knowing that even in such an emergency as the present, it behoved him to regard appearances before seeking an interview with

Sir Andrew and Lady Herriesson. After seeing to some necessary matters connected with his duties for the morrow, he started to walk up to the great house.

Ten o'clock was striking as he reached it.

At the hall-door stood a fly, with two reeking horses; and John was informed that Sir Andrew was particularly engaged with some strangers, who had just arrived.

"Never mind," persisted John. "Let Sir Andrew or her ladyship know that I am here, and must see one or other of them on most urgent business."

He was at once admitted.

In the library, with his back to the fire, his arrogant face purple with excitement, his short thick grey hair bristling, as it seemed, from the same cause, over his narrow little head, stood Sir Andrew. Opposite him were Lowndes Cartaret and Mr. Forbes. Lady Herriesson was in an arm-chair. She was more mildly affected than her lord by Lowndes's extraordinary statement, but she moaned and shook her head, and feebly echoed Sir Andrew from time to time. The young man had told his story as succinctly as possible; but his story was not the whole

truth. He had decided that it was unnecessary to state in what capacity Miss Pomeroy had been. an inmate of Beckworth House. He glided over her introduction there, stating that "she was kind enough to make herself of use" to his mother in reading, and various other ways. It was not his object to wound the Herriesson pride, and set them in antagonism to himself. Sir Andrew managed to contain himself, until Lowndes reached the climax of his narrative. Then he burst forth :

"Damnation, sir! with the curate? The curate of this parish? It's impossible! I say it's impossible!"

"Quite impossible!" murmured Lady Herriesson. "And on Thursday morning? And this is Saturday night! . . . The man has been away, certainly, but—oh! it's not possible!"

"All I know, Sir Andrew, is the fact that Miss Pomeroy left my mother's roof, under the protection of some one whom my mother believed to be the curate of this place, and who came with the avowed intention of restoring her to your care. When I learnt from Mr. Forbes that you had heard nothing of her, I resolved to lose no time in placing you in possession of these facts."

“We are very much indebted to you for all the trouble you have taken in this painful business, Mr. Cartaret,” said Sir Andrew, pompously.

“Impossible to say how much indebted we are,” came from the folds of Lady Herriesson’s handkerchief, which she held to her eyes.

“I can’t believe it yet,” continued the baronet. “But by Heaven, if it turns out to be true, I’ll strip his gown off his back. I’ll set the bishop on him, as sure as his name is Miles. If her going off like this has been a blind of his to make Lady Herriesson and me consent to a marriage——”

“Have you any reason to suspect that such was . . . was Miss Pomeroy’s wish? that she fancied this fellow Miles at all?” interrupted Lowndes. The question was not lost upon Mr. Forbes, who, in the journey down, had noted many indications of the real nature of the young man’s interest in the case.

“No . . . well, I’m fairly puzzled . . . I don’t know what to say. She was always going to the village, pretending it was to visit the poor. I taxed her, one day that we had a discussion, with carrying on a flirtation with the curate, but she denied that

she ever met him, except accidentally, for a minute or two, and, by Jove! she would not have denied it if it had been true. She liked doing that sort of thing. The rascal must have got round her in some extraordinary way, if it is so . . . I'll send down to the village, and see if he is returned."

His hand was on the bell, when the groom of the chambers entered, and announced that the Reverend Mr. Miles was below.

"D—n it, Forbes," cried Sir Andrew, turning to the lawyer, "this looks as if it were true! Show him in instantly."

John had never yet felt at his ease in the great house. Less than ever did he do so as he crossed the threshold of the drawing-room that night. He met four antagonistic faces directed towards him, and two of them were unknown to him. John glanced at the lawyer, and felt that this stranger, whoever he might be, was scrutinising him keenly. He turned to the younger man, and, though by no means favourably impressed, experienced that kind of unpleasant fascination which compels one to look again. Lowndes stuck his glass in his eye, and "took stock" of the curate, from his rubicund face down

to his large, well-rubbed hands (which Lowndes knew must be smelling of yellow soap), and thence to his capacious feet. John had walked fast, and was warm. Lowndes derived infinite satisfaction from a careful survey of the rival before him. The contrast between the two was curious. One might be likened to an impudent supercilious terrier, who regards the world disparagingly; the other to an ungainly shepherd's dog, whose fidelity and watchfulness wear but a sorry coat.

"It isn't possible," said Lowndes to himself, as he curled the ends of his moustache, "that she can care for a fellow like that." But before the interview was over, another voice had replied, "He has that within him which you have not. She respects him: she cannot respect you. Therefore, to such an one as she even this is possible, that she should marry a fellow with a nose like a lobster, who doesn't know what the devil to do with his hands and his feet!"

The proceedings opened thus. The door had scarcely closed behind Miles before Sir Andrew shouted out, "Well, sir! what have you come here to say, eh?"

John glanced at the strangers. "What I have to

say, Sir Andrew, must be said privately to you and Lady——”

“Oh, never mind these gentlemen, sir. They are friends of mine, and you arrive very opportunely to confront them, and to meet their charge, if you can. Shall I tell you what they say, sir? That Miss Pomeroy’s evasion from this house is your doing.”

“It is untrue,” replied John, simply.

“Pardon me, Sir Andrew; there is no proof—we did not advance *that*,” said Forbes.

“Well, then, that you induced her to leave Beckworth House with you two days ago.”

“That is true. I am here to tell you so.”

“Oh! you are, are you? You confess it, then? And where the devil has she been ever since?”

“Under my aunt, Mrs. Hicks’s, roof at Salisbury.”

“And why were we not apprised of the fact before?”

“Well, the truth is, Miss Pomeroy destroyed both a telegram and a letter that I wrote to Lady Herriesson on Thursday. I only learnt this last night.”

“I don’t believe it. I don’t believe one word of it. Why the devil, sir, did you take her to any aunt of yours, instead of bringing her here? It is a *plant*. I see the whole thing now. I believe you knew where she was all along. You thought, after all this scandal, that we should be only too glad to consent to her marrying any one—even a fellow like you. But you’ll find yourself mistaken, sir. I look upon you as an unmitigated rascal, and I shall put the bishop in possession of all the facts of the case to-morrow.”

“You are disgracing yourself, Sir Andrew,” said John, who grew more and more self-possessed as the baronet’s rage increased—“you are disgracing yourself far more than you can injure me by your unwarrantable suspicions. When I left this, on Monday, I knew as little where Miss Pomeroy was as yourself. I followed up a slight clue till I found her, under circumstances which made it very advisable that she should be removed at once to other keeping.”

“You own it! Upon my life, sir, your coolness is amazing! As if Mrs. Cartaret’s, of Beckworth (whom I know well, by name), was not better than any Mrs. Hicks’s! Miss Pomeroy disgraced herself,

and has caused Lady Herriesson great anxiety by her conduct; but the refuge she sought was at least respectable. At any rate, with Mrs. Cartaret she was under good protection."

"I am afraid, very far from it," said John, quietly.

Lowndes bit his lip. Before he could speak, Sir Andrew exclaimed, "What do you mean by that, sir? Come, I insist upon your speaking. No prevarications."

"I will tell you what I mean, Sir Andrew. I found Miss Pomeroy made the subject of coarse jokes from railway-guards and servants, owing to Mr. Cartaret's attentions, a young man, apparently, of very lax principles, whom it is not good for any girl's name to be coupled with."

"Oh! indeed? Well, *this* is Mr. Cartaret. If you have anything further to say about him, except what you have gathered from the low gossip of servants, perhaps you will be good enough to say it to his face."

The two young men looked at each other fixedly for a moment. John would not have been human had not a pang of bitter jealousy shot across his

heart as his eye fell upon the carelessly graceful lines of Lowndes's figure. He leaned against the mantel-piece, his hands in his pockets, his legs crossed. John sighed. It was but an instant. He recovered himself; and without betraying surprise at the announcement, said, calmly: "No, I have nothing to add, except this, that Miss Pomeroy left Beckworth, at last, by Mrs. Cartaret's desire. I had urged her returning here; but in vain. When Mrs. Cartaret insisted upon her leaving, therefore, I induced her to accept my aunt's protection until some plan for her future can be decided on."

"And, on your oath, as a clergyman," said Sir Andrew, in his most magisterial voice, "have you no hope that such a 'plan for the future' may be her acceptance of beggary and a curate's cottage, eh? On your oath, sir, have you or have you not tried to persuade Miss Pomeroy to marry you?"

His unfortunate trick of colouring up to the roots of his hair was never more distressing to John than at that moment. After an instant's hesitation he said: "Most men would decline to answer your question, Sir Andrew; but I shall not do so. Yes, I have asked Miss Pomeroy to be my wife; and, in

spite of discouragement, the dearest hope of my life still is, that she may one day consent to be mine. I have done nothing underhand. Although I have loved her for years, I should never have dreamt of speaking to her, but for her leaving home as she did. That altered the case. I spoke to her for the first time last night, after she told me she was resolutely determined not to return here. I do not think myself called upon to repeat what passed. I have told you straightforwardly what my hopes are, that you may not accuse me of deception. She has a home with my aunt for as long as she likes to remain there."

"Your candour is really refreshing, Mr. Miles. Well, at least now, we know what we are about, and whom we have got to deal with!" Sir Andrew's rage was at white heat. He no longer flung his words about wildly, but spoke with a concentrated essence of venom. "I am glad you have made this last admission, sir. It is the only word of truth you have spoken for the last quarter of an hour, I believe. I have no doubt that, under cover of your cloth, you have got an influence over this girl, until she has consented to complete her disgrace by marrying you.

Now, look here : you think this will be a very fine thing for you, I suppose ; that, when the thing is done, I shall relent, and make a provision for any brats you may have : you will find yourself utterly mistaken. Miss Pomeroy has no claims of any sort upon me. If she chooses to marry you, or the groom, she may. She shall never have one farthing of my money, if I can help it."

"I am very sure she would not accept it," said John, at last warming. "I shall not stoop to deny anything you please to say, Sir Andrew. It is useless to argue with a man in your condition of mind, and who forgets himself, as a gentleman, so far as to use the language you do. There is Miss Pomeroy's address" (he laid a paper on the table). "She desired me to beg that you would not go to her, as she was resolved not to return here ; but about that you will act as you think fit. Good evening, Lady Herriesson."

And without waiting for another word from Sir Andrew, he strode to the door, passed through the vast dimly-lit hall, and out, down a flight of steps, into the darkness. Poor John Miles ! He was but meeting with that reward which so often attends the

purest and noblest actions in life—misconstruction and ingratitude on all sides.

What happened at Mortlands, after John had left, was this. Lady Herriesson, after feebly moaning that she always thought so, that she never had had a good opinion of Mr. Miles since that sermon of his about the Prodigal Son, which Maud admired, and which *she* thought so shocking and subversive; Lady Herriesson roused herself to the exigence of things present, and ordered supper for her guests. Sir Andrew said of course Mr. Cartaret would not think of leaving Mortlands that night? and the common act of hospitality was gladly accepted. Lowndes had every desire to ingratiate himself with his hosts; and when he so willed it, no one could be more agreeable. The groom of the chambers showed him his room, that he might wash his hands; but apparently, Mr. Forbes was not as particular about his (has not the law always clean hands?); or else it was that he wished to say a word to Sir Andrew in private. I presume he gave the baronet the benefit of his guess as to the nature of Lowndes's interest in this matter, and that he pointed out what a golden solution to the difficult question, What was

to become of the young lady now? such a marriage as this would be. Sir Andrew's shrewdness, unassisted, would hardly have prepared him to receive without surprise the confidence that was made to him later in the evening. For Lowndes felt driven by John Miles's words to avow himself in a way that he had never dreamt of doing when he entered the house.

"After the things Mr. Miles thought fit to say, Sir Andrew, it is due to myself and to you, that I should speak."

"My dear Mr. Cartaret," said Sir Andrew, blandly, "I assure you I don't attach the smallest importance to the lies that fellow chose to utter."

"They were not altogether lies, Sir Andrew. I daresay he heard that gossip, and I want to explain it to you. I am sorry to say, I have been a loose fish——"

"Oh, we all have—all have in our time! what of that? Wild oats, eh?" but the baronet had gathered unto himself, in the course of years, such a harvest of respectability, that it was hard to believe in the crop to which he referred.

"The fact is, I admire Miss Pomeroy more than any girl I have ever seen. I have never thought of

marriage, to tell you the honest truth, till now. And I certainly should not have spoken to you on the subject at present, feeling as I do, quite ignorant of what her sentiments towards me are, but that I have been in a measure forced into this, as you see. After what has been said, I wish you to understand, Sir Andrew, that my hope is, sooner or later, to persuade Miss Pomeroy to become my wife."

Sir Andrew held out his hand.

"Spoken like a gentleman, Mr. Cartaret. I can only say that Lady Herriesson and I wish you every success with this very wilful girl. Her conduct, which has been the cause of such grief to Lady Herriesson, could hardly have justified us, I candidly own, in expecting her to make so excellent a match; but she is so eccentric, one doesn't know what she may do. She refused one of the greatest matches in the county just before she went off. No arguing with her—as obstinate as a mule! However, now, I should hope, in fact I have little doubt, she will see the necessity, in the position in which she has placed herself, of—of—accepting you."

Lowndes could hardly help smiling, thoroughly in earnest though he was.

“No, Sir Andrew. It is because I feel sure she will not accept me from necessity, that I mean to ask her. I propose to go to Salisbury to-morrow.”

Sir Andrew warmly approved of “striking the iron while it is hot,” as he called it. The baronet was to follow him the next morning; it being judged wiser that Lowndes should have his interview with Maud before her stepfather’s arrival. None of the party from the great house were at church that morning. In the afternoon the dogcart drove Lowndes to the station, to meet the only Sunday up-train.

CHAPTER XV.

It was one of those early spring mornings which belong peculiarly to England. A pale vapour veiled the otherwise too keen blueness of the sky from British eyes. All nature seemed to be awaking with a sigh of refreshment from its winter sleep. The air was warm and filled with sound. Sparrows, chaffinches, and other small birds were holding a parliament under the eaves of the gabled house. There was the distant hum of the town; the cries and whistles of children on the green; the solemn, sweet bells of the cathedral hard by, chiming the quarters.

Maud, leaving the old lady's bedside, where she had been reading aloud some pages of Jeremy Taylor, came downstairs, and passed out, through the parlour-window, into the garden, impelled by a desire to breathe the fresh morning air, after being shut up in

a close room for hours. This small garden, which fronted the house, was protected from the road by a privet-hedge, having an iron gate in the centre. There was a gravel-walk running from end to end, bounded by lilac-bushes, the pale pink tips of whose branches were now swelling into tender green from day to day. And along it was a flower-border, where the crocuses had long been up and stirring; and now the hyacinths were beginning to push their gorgeous-coloured heads through the rich brown mould.

Maud walked up and down, listening to the noisy chatter of the birds among the ivied gables, and inhaling the wholesome incense of the early spring. She did not note much of what was around her, indeed, for her mind was pre-occupied; but she felt the influence of the season. Something of the profound depression under which she had laboured for the last four days was lifted from her heart.

There was a rapid step on the pavement outside the hedge, and the iron gate was opened. Maud's back was towards it at the moment. When she turned she found herself face to face with Lowndes. The blood rushed to her face; no amount of self-

control could prevent that ; and she stood motionless, as he approached, undecided what to do. Somehow, she seemed to him, at this moment, a thousand times handsomer than he had ever thought her. Yet she wore the same stuff dress he had seen her in every day ; there was no difference in the outward woman, as she stood there, backed by the ivy, the April sun touching the edges of her hair : she was the same Mary, his mother's maid, from whom he had parted only a week before. Was the change in himself—or in her ? Was it that the conquest of his better over his worse nature irradiated the object of that struggle ? Was it that Maud, no longer in a false position, had lost something of her defiant air, and that, do what she would, a tenderness shone out of her glad eyes—eyes which had turned on him mostly in reproof, not seldom in fiery indignation ? Or, was it the jealous dread which, in spite of Miles's personal appearance, he could not yet dismiss, that this prize might be reft from him, after all ? Trace it to what cause one will, this was the result. He stood there, before her, feeling that this prize, concerning which he had hesitated, and made many a mighty wise resolution, was worth more, far more, than he could

possibly pay for it. He took her hand, and she allowed it to remain in his for a moment before she withdrew it.

“Miss Pomeroy, can you forget and forgive the past?” he began. “I am come here to put myself at your feet, and to tell you how ashamed I am of myself, and how grieved that my mother should have treated you as she has done. But, make allowances for her, will you? She did not understand your position. I understand it all now.”

“Do you?” She shook her head. “It is hard to understand how a girl can wish to escape from luxury into servitude. There is no need to make allowances for Mrs. Cartaret. It was unjustifiable of me to enter her house as I did. I see that now. If I have something to forgive, I have much to be forgiven.”

“When she comes to know the real truth——”

“There is no more to be learnt than she knows,” said Maud, quickly.

“My mother is very prejudiced, and very impetuous. I am afraid that she may have said . . . in short, you will forgive her, won't you?”

“Yes, I forgive her. I have only myself to thank

for the lesson it has taught me. I must look for work henceforward in other fields."

"No, not so. . . . In the same field, only in another capacity," he said, taking her hand again. "There is a work which you've begun, and which you alone can accomplish."

She looked at him for a moment steadily; then turned away, and began plucking at the ivy on the wall.

"Will you not speak? Are you still angry with me on account of my conduct?"

Still no answer.

"If your object is to do some good in the world, you can best do it to me. You wouldn't have taken so much pains to reclaim me, I think, if you hated me."

"I have forgiven you the personal offence to myself," she said, quietly, at last. "I think of you in sorrow, Mr. Cartaret, not anger. You look at life as a comedy; nothing to you is serious, nothing deep. The passing gratification of the hour—that is all you care for. It amused you to talk with me; and after I had been in your mother's house three weeks, you could not resist behaving as you did. So much for my influence!"

“Pray don't refer to that again. To prove your influence, let me tell you that I've already taken the first step towards working seriously. No one but you could have got me to take it. As to my future, if you only will, you shall direct it entirely.”

“I cannot. You see how unable I am to direct myself. I know that life was not given us to waste, as you do. You have capital abilities, and, you say, perseverance. I can only beg you to turn your life to some better account than you have done.”

“Will you help me, Mary?”

“My name is not Mary.” A smile just touched the corners of her mouth. “You must forget that name. I left it behind me at Beckworth. . . . A man should not require ‘help’ to do what is right.”

“He does, though. And there is a help which only a woman can give him. Last week I meant to have waited before I spoke to you again. But all is changed now. I can't wait. You have left Beckworth. They tell me you refuse to return to your home. What is the use of waiting? In what I said to you last week I shall never change. I shall be the same a year—two years hence. Why wander

about any longer in this way, when there is a home opening its arms to receive you?"

"It does not—it never will open its arms," she replied. "Were I to marry you, your mother's worst suspicions would be confirmed. Say no more about it. It can never be."

"Is this the only obstacle? . . . Tell me one thing. Do you care in the least about me?"

"There is no use in talking thus, Mr. Cartaret. My pride is very great, and I shall certainly never marry you."

"There is use. I implore you to answer me this one question. Do you—or can you ever—care for me?"

She turned almost angrily upon him, and then her brown eyes filled with tears.

"You have no right to ask that question when I tell you that I can never be your wife."

"But, is my mother the only obstacle? I would wait patiently, and work with twice the energy, if you would tell me that, and say that you trusted me."

"Why should I trust you? If you mean by trust a belief in the lastingness of your . . . your present state of feeling. No; I should be sorry to

trust in that. Perhaps I have taught you not to think quite so lightly of women, that is all. Another woman will, some day, complete the work of which I have laid the small foundations."

"She never will. None will ever obtain the ascendancy over me you have done."

"You think so now. If we meet years hence, you will thank me for not believing you——"

"May I, at least, write to you?"

"No; your mother shall never be able to reproach me with keeping this fancy of yours alive by any encouragement. Let it die out as quickly as you can And now, good-by!"

"Stay, one moment longer Where are you going? What are your plans?"

"I think of training for a hospital nurse."

"Good Heavens, what an idea! But your people Sir Andrew will never hear of such a thing. I assure you he and Lady Herriesson seem distressed beyond measure at——"

"You have seen them, then? You have been at Mortlands?"

"I came from there last night. Sir Andrew follows me here to-day. He will plead my cause,

perhaps, from the worldly point of view; but I told him I knew that would have no weight with you."

"Oh, he is coming here, is he? In spite of my letting him know it was absolutely useless? I am glad you do me the justice to think that I am not likely to yield to any of the arguments Sir Andrew is sure to use. Nothing that he could say upon any subject would have any weight with me. At present, I mean to remain here. I can be of use to this old lady, and, therefore, I may as well stay."

"She's that curate's aunt, isn't she?" asked Lowndes, sharply.

"Yes. He begged me to remain here, as he was obliged to go away."

"I shouldn't think *that* was exactly the reason; but of course he's anxious for you to stay. He'll be running backwards and forwards, no doubt. All parsons are 'cute after their own interests. I saw his game at once."

"He is a most excellent man," said Maud, a little maliciously. "You don't know him."

"I've seen him—that's quite enough. Surely it's impossible;—but I suppose I have no right to ask the question. Only as he very plainly told us

that he meant to marry you, if he could, I venture to hope you will not throw yourself away on a fellow like that."

"I might go nearer and fare worse, perhaps. If Mr. Miles married me, it would be he who threw himself away. But there is no possibility of that. I shall not allow him to sacrifice himself so far," she added with a little smile.

"Well, he means to persevere—and so do I. Only promise to wait, will you? See, in six months, if my feelings are changed. See if I haven't had the pluck to work all that time. And see, then, if my mother doesn't welcome you with open arms."

A gig drove up to the door.

"There is the doctor," said Maud, glad of the subterfuge to avoid replying to this speech. She could not—she knew she ought not—to believe him; but her head was in a tumult. She could scarcely master herself sufficiently to continue calmly. "I must go, Mr. Cartaret. I hope my preachings may really have some effect in making you work. Good-by."

They shook hands, like ordinary acquaintances, while the old apothecary came shuffling along the

gravel-walk. And the witness to this commonplace parting little guessed the struggle and the conquest that it sealed.

By one o'clock, Sir Andrew was in Salisbury. He found a note awaiting him at the inn. It ran thus :

“ DEAR SIR ANDREW,—No luck at present. I am off to town by the next train, but I don't despair yet.

“ Yours truly,

“ LOWNDES CARTARET.”

When the baronet read that he was sore displeased. And if he did not rend his clothes, after the manner of the wrathful kings of Judah, he rent his language, at least, with a vengeance, as he walked up and down the little inn-parlour, scattering oaths broadcast. In this implacable frame of mind, he set off for the widow's house.

Maud was prepared, by Lowndes's announcement, for this inevitable visit. She said to herself that she would be as conciliatory as possible ; she would set a guard upon her tongue ; but she would be firm as a rock.

And as a rock, in truth, she received the white-

crested breakers of Sir Andrew's tide of reproach and indignation, as wave after wave rolled in, and broke over her in a foam of vituperation. She was a disgrace to the family—a byword in the county: she had broken her stepmother's heart: no young lady would ever associate with her again: her conduct could never be forgotten, as long as she remained unmarried. And yet—would it be believed? In her degraded position, a young man of good connection and fortune offered her his hand—and, it seemed, she actually refused him! This was the crowning act of all! She was only fit for Bedlam. If it were printed in a book, no one would believe it. He went on thus for nearly an hour; and Maud sat listening to him with wonderful patience, resolved to try and let the storm expend itself, before reaching the only point which could have any practical result. The curate's luckless candour had exposed him to the baronet's attack; and he did not spare him.

“And I suppose now you'll marry this scoundrel! But the whole county shall hear what he is, you may depend on it. I'll go to the bishop this very day. We shall see whether a blackguard of this kind can decoy away——”

“I can't hear you speak of Mr. Miles in this way, Sir Andrew. He knew as little about my leaving Mortlands, or where I went, as you did. If it appears you to know that I shall never marry him, you may rest assured I never shall. But I mean to remain here for the present, as he has asked me to do so, and his aunt is very ill.”

“It is very remarkable,” said Sir Andrew, with a sneer, for her assurance had appeased him somewhat, “that you who are so sensitive about being dependent upon me, should not hesitate to be dependent upon an utter stranger.”

“I am of use. It was because I was of no use at Mortlands, but only a burden, that I could stand it no longer.”

Did Sir Andrew's conscience prick him with a remembrance of certain hard things he had said, in those days? It is scarcely likely; that instrument of self-torture being somewhat blunt in the baronet's case. But he repeated the words: “‘Of no use!’ Stuff! Of what use is a girl in your station ever expected to be? But there's no arguing with you, I know of old. How long do you remain here? You can't stay here with this old woman for ever.”

“I have no very definite plans. Of course I shan't remain here for ever.”

“Well, we go to town next month. There's your room, you know, in Eaton Square, if you choose to come. Of course I can't make you. You're your own mistress. But after all the anxiety you have caused your mother, if you have a spark of good-feeling——”

“No,” interrupted Maud, in her quick way, “I can't go to Eaton Square, unless mamma is ill, and really wants me. I will go then, for it is a duty; but not otherwise. But I will write to her, and I promise not to leave this, without letting her know my plans. You see you have extracted two promises from me, Sir Andrew: let that suffice for the present.”

He stayed some time longer, and he talked a good deal more, chiefly about Lowndes: but he gained no further advantage. The limits of concession which Maud had marked out, she adhered to.

Sir Andrew returned to Mortlands that evening in a very bad humour; and with but one consolation. He had Maud's assurance that she would never marry the curate; and, after this statement, he knew her too well to have any further uneasiness on that head.

But as to the Cartaret marriage, when he had urged it on her, she had refused to listen to him; stating in almost the same words that she had used in reference to Miles, that she should never be Lowndes's wife. It was too provoking, just as a loophole was provided to escape creditably from this "fix!" Moreover, there was the strait in which he had placed himself touching Miles. After the language Sir Andrew had used, how was he to hold out the hand of condescending apology to the man who lived at his park-gates, and whom he had so grossly vilified?

It is needless to say that he had not carried out his threatened visit to the bishop.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. HICKS rallied very slowly. Weeks passed : and her condition was still one that required constant watching. Having undertaken this duty, Maud could not abandon it ; and she became daily fonder of the gentle, unselfish old lady, so that her labour grew to be one of love. On the other hand, as was only natural, Mrs. Hicks was now strongly attached to her young companion.

“ I do not know what I should do now, my dear, if I were to lose you. You have spoilt me. We have never had anything young in the house before you came. As Martha says, you do us all good.” For Maud’s energy, which had often flagged at Beckworth, and had always been in a chronic state of suppressed irritation at Mortlands, had now free play. She read aloud for hours, and answered all Mrs.

Hicks's letters; she visited such poor people as the old lady wished, and dispensed her charities; she paid all Mrs. Hicks's bills, and attended her benevolent committees; she took long walks, and returned home laden with wild hyacinths and primroses. The secret of this cheerful, untiring temper, I believe, was the well-spring of a strong hope within her. In vain she set a stone upon the mouth of that spring; it bubbled up all the same at unexpected times and places. She had not heard Lowndes's name since the day they parted: she knew nothing of him, for good or evil: he was probably back again with his old companions and pursuits, and had forgotten her and her preachings. It was only natural; it would be contrary to nearly all precedent if it were otherwise. So she said to herself, repeatedly; but she did not believe it. She declared that it would be sentimental folly to rely upon anything he had said; but she did rely upon it. Love is, even now, sometimes stronger than prudence and worldly wisdom. Then, as regarded Mrs. Cartaret, she felt a conviction that, even if Lowndes remained constant, his mother would never yield. She knew the old lady's pride and prejudice so well. After what had passed,

Mrs. Cartaret would never open her arms to receive Maud, and without such opening of arms Maud was still resolute that she would never become Lowndes's wife. But, in spite of all, Maud was not despondent.

John Miles did not return to Salisbury for two or three weeks, the account of his aunt being better, and his own judgment pointing out that it was wiser to leave Maud at peace for a time, before renewing his suit. Then at last he did come, and stayed three days. During that time Maud kept out of his way as much as possible : and Mrs. Hicks was always devising innocent little stratagems (which she regarded as Machiavelian in their diplomacy, but which would not have deceived a child) in order to throw the young people together. But Maud's avoidance was not to be misunderstood ; eager as poor John was to catch at any straw, there was none held out ; he must drown—at all events for the present. She was cordial and friendly in her manner until they were *tête-à-tête* ; if this was unavoidable, she froze up, as Maud had a special faculty for doing, making one feel that any nearer approach would be slippery, not to say dangerous. He went away

without having said a word. But his aunt was not so perspicacious.

“My dear,” she said one day when they were alone, “I have been hesitating for a long time whether I should say something to you. But I may not be here very long, and I do so wish to see two people whom I love dearly made happy before I go. No, my dear, don’t interrupt me. Now I have begun, I must speak. You see how it is with John, don’t you, my dear? Depend upon it, the love of such a man ought not lightly to be put aside. I know your papa and mamma were very angry at the idea, because John is a poor man, but—but—what I wanted to say is this. He will be well off at my death. For many years I have put by more than half my income to accumulate for him. He will have, at the least, eighteen hundred a year. And the knowledge of this, though it will not affect you, I am well aware, may influence your papa and mamma: and therefore——”

“Dearest Mrs. Hicks, I must stop you. If this marriage were possible, what you say would influence Sir Andrew and Lady Herriesson; but it is not possible. I have the greatest regard and respect for

your nephew, but I can never be his wife. Please say no more about it."

"Ah, my dear, consider! Where will you find such a character as John's again? He is as nearly perfect as any human being can be, I think. It is not"—and the old lady hesitated a moment—"it is not his nose? It is not his personal appearance, is it, my dear? Beauty is a vain thing—it is as the grass of the field. I hope it isn't that."

"It has nothing to do with personal appearance—I know his worth. He is the best man I have ever met; but I'm not made to be the wife of such a man. If I ever marry, it will be a far less perfect character—indeed, a very imperfect one!" And then, wishing to set this question at rest, once and for ever, and driven by one of those sudden impulses, which are sometimes worth a year's deliberation, she confessed that her heart was not free.

"I know what you will say—that I am wasting my life in a delusion. Very likely. Understand that I have no hope, my dear old friend; but for all that, I can't marry another, nor will you urge me to do so, now that you know the truth."

It was thus that she concluded her confession;

and Mrs. Hicks pressed the girl's hand and sighed. She never spoke upon the subject again.

John Miles passed all the rest of the spring alone at Mortlands. There had been a hollow sort of reconciliation between him and Sir Andrew: a cold shaking of hands at the church-door; and now the family at the great house was up in London, and John had the village all to himself, and more solitary hours than ever, wherein to dwell upon a passion which he knew was hopeless. For Mrs. Hicks, in compassion for her dear nephew, had not kept Maud's secret.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON Lowndes's return from Salisbury after his interview with Maud, there had been some violent scenes between Mrs. Cartaret and her son. For the first time in his life, Lowndes found it impossible, even after repeated efforts, to make any impression on his mother. In all their differences, heretofore, he had ultimately "got round" her; but now, the original wound in her mind having been kept in a constant state of irritation by the judicious application of blisters from Mrs. Rouse, every word Lowndes dropped only inflamed it more. Lowndes was not a patient young man; not used to be thwarted, nor submissive under rebuke. He had departed for London at the end of the second day, and had not since been down to Beckworth. He wrote occasionally to his mother, inquiring briefly after her

health, but never naming himself. From others, however, Mrs. Cartaret had accounts of her son's changed mode of life, which amazed her. She could hardly believe her ears when told of her dissipated vaurien's working eight hours a day: of his being no longer seen in the Park, nor in any of the haunts of men. She inquired anxiously whether he had any liaison, as a natural solution to the mystery. But none of the vultures who feed upon the carrion of society could affirm as much. And the idea of Maud's being the cause of this revolution never crossed Mrs. Cartaret's mind. He had quarrelled with her about the girl, it is true; and being the proud, obstinate boy he was, he would not come home properly ashamed and contrite, as he ought. That was his character. But that he had not forgotten the object of their dissension long since, still less that the recollection of her was of sufficient force to stimulate him to a new life, this was a suggestion which Mrs. Cartaret would have regarded as wildly improbable. Why, he never even named Maud! He never renewed the subject of their quarrel! It was, fortunately, quite clear that he had forgotten the cunning little aventurière.

When, however, Easter and Whitsuntide—holiday seasons which had never passed without Lowndes's running down to Beckworth for a day or two—when these came and went, and Mrs. Cartaret was still ungladdened by the sight of her son, she began to feel very heavy at heart. Not even the satisfaction of learning that his life was reformed could compensate for this: the cloud which had arisen as a man's hand was consolidating itself into a compact mass, till it threatened to darken the whole sky overhead. For a while her pride kept her from asking him to come. At last, she could stand it no longer, and broke out thus in one of her letters: "Your favourite hantboys are now ripe, and will be all over if you do not pay them a visit soon." But the hantboys passed; and other fruits succeeded them; and still he came not. "If you should be ill, send for me. Otherwise I am not coming to Beckworth," he wrote; and the old lady was furious. She indited a piebald letter, in which French and English expletives vied for predominance: declaring that a monster of ingratitude had been born unto her, that she had nourished a viper in her bosom, that he was sans cœur, sans entrailles, and that he would come to no

good end, that was clear. After despatching this, she had a comfortable fit of hysterics, and poured her woes into the sympathising breast of Mrs. Rouse.

“It’s the undutifullest thing as ever I heard of!” cries the artful prime-minister; “after Mr. Lowndes’s conduct, his writing like that, instead of going down on his bended knees! Can’t say much for his reform, if this is the fruits—he don’t place much account by the fifth commandment. Them as practises law forgets their religion, it seems to me. I never did hold much by law. He’ll only come here, ma’am, if you’re ill. Wants to see, I suppose, as your will is properly made!”

By which specimen it will be seen that Mrs. Rouse’s ascendancy, and the licence of tongue permitted to her, were increased rather than diminished. In short, the episode of Maud’s short career at Beckworth had, no doubt, strengthened the house-keeper’s position. The vacant post had been filled by a dull girl who could in no way be a companion to the old lady. But then she was Mrs. Rouse’s devoted slave; and if Mrs. Cartaret complained of the girl’s stupidity, she was met by the retort, “Per-

haps you'd like to find a young lady again as has run away from her home? A hussy as tries to entrap your son, ma'am?" To which there was no reply; but in the inmost recesses of her heart, I fear Mrs. Cartaret was at times almost tempted to wish for such another runaway. Of this particular one she could not, of course, think without some bitterness—she had wrought so much mischief. "The devil himself must have made the girl," as she wrote to one of her old friends. "Such a fascination had she—such a power to impressing you with a sense of straightness! And yet, my friend, she was a liar! . . . I actually cried, old fool that I am, when I had to turn her out of the house, I had got to love the little wretch so, in the course of that month! Ah, my friend, what a world! Was there such deceit, such treachery in the old times? I think not."

The yoke of Rouse and Dapper grew more galling every day. Mrs. Cartaret's life was as solitary and cheerless as that of the Pope in the Vatican, without such consolations as may belong to supremacy. The shadow and insignia of royalty were still hers; but the substance had passed from her. She grew more inert, and with less energy for discussion or command

daily, for her heart was sorely troubled. Heretofore Lowndes had exercised a certain restraint over the arrogant ministry which no opposition had ever been able to put out of office. Now, they did absolutely as they liked. And thus the summer wore away.

In August an unprecedented thing befel John Miles: he went to London for a month. A curate friend, who had been ill and required country air, asked if he would exchange duties with him, and he did so. John's journey up was marked by a small incident. In a corner of the same carriage with himself sat a rigid-looking man, whose age it was impossible to tell, but whose creaseless face seemed not quite unfamiliar to Miles. The rigid man's memory was the better of the two.

"Mr. Miles, I believe?" he said, without a smile, or the derangement of one unnecessary muscle: "I think we met at dinner at Mortlands. You are the curate? My name is Durborough." Then, after the exchange of a few words, he continued:—"Sir Andrew and Lady Herriesson are at Wiesbaden, are they not?"

"Yes: they are gone for Sir Andrew's gout."

“And where is that unfortunate young lady, Miss Pomeroy?”

“I am not aware that she is unfortunate,” replied John, sternly. “She is at Salisbury, where, I hear, she is well and happy.”

But Durborough of Durborough was too dense to take a hint.

“I hope she will keep respectable. She was a fine-grown young woman. I don’t mind telling you, Mr. Miles—perhaps you may have heard it—I was very near making her Mrs. Durborough. What an escape!”

“Whoever is lucky enough to get Miss Pomeroy’s hand wins a great prize, sir,” cries John, as red as a turkey-cock. After which Mr. Durborough relapsed into silence, and sat up stiffer than ever during the rest of the journey. But those few words gave John food for thought. They influenced him, perhaps, as much as anything towards a decision which he came to, on arriving in town.

Mr. Forbes was alone in his office when a card was brought him. He desired the gentleman to be admitted.

“I am a stranger to you, Mr. Forbes,” began John Miles, as he entered.

“Not at all: I remember you perfectly, sir. I have often wished since for an opportunity of expressing personally to you my regret at having been the indirect cause of your being so roughly used that night by our friend Sir Andrew. Under an entire misapprehension, you see, his temper got the better of him: it does sometimes. But he knows now what an injustice he did you.”

“I am glad of it,” said John, calmly. “It was not to speak of Sir Andrew, however, that I came here.” He paused for a moment. “I have always heard your name mentioned with great respect, Mr. Forbes, as a man of the highest principle, as well as of very clear judgment. I am going to speak on a delicate subject, and must ask you to let what I shall say go no further. You know Mr. Lowndes Cartaret well? I am told he is studying for the bar, and working hard. This is the result of some inquiries I have made since coming to town. Is this true?”

“It is quite true, Mr. Miles.”

“From your knowledge of his character, have you any idea what has wrought this change, and do you believe it will be a permanent one?”

“I have a very distinct idea what has wrought this change : indeed, I have a certainty, and I believe it will be permanent.”

John paused a minute, as if hesitating how he should put his next question.

“Do he and Sir Andrew meet now?”

“Yes ; Mr. Cartaret sees both him and Lady Herriesson constantly.”

“Sir Andrew then is—is—favourable to him?”

“Entirely so.”

Miles blew his nose vehemently, and fidgeted on his chair. “Look here, Mr. Forbes : I don’t want you to commit any breach of confidence, but tell me one thing. If Mr. Cartaret is the man you take him to be, why shouldn’t he—what impediment is there —to—to——”

“Mr. Miles, there is no use in beating about the bush. Let us talk plainly. What impediment is there to his marrying Miss Pomeroy at once ? His mother——”

“Surely,” replied John, with a sigh that came from the very bottom of his heart, “surely Mrs. Cartaret cannot persist in misjudging a girl who is exercising such a saving influence upon her son ? It

is hard enough, I think, that the world should continue to regard that one act of folly as though it were a deadly crime. A fool in the train talked to me of the escape he had had from her—God help him! Mr. Forbes, it is just this brings me here to-day. You know how I love her; you heard me avow it to Sir Andrew, and the hopes I then had. Well, they are at an end. I have no more hope now, for I know that her heart is another's; but I love her still, Mr. Forbes, and if I can do anything towards making her really happy, I will do it, cost me what it may."

The lawyer shook his visitor's hand, in silence, and John continued: "I own I feared that Mr. Cartaret could never be worthy of her. But if it is true that he is reformed, then," he said, with an effort, "the sooner this marriage can be, the better. Longer delay is only injurious to her good name. My aunt is nearly well; in a few weeks I know that Miss Pomeroy will leave her, and seek a living elsewhere. For her sake, for every one's sake, this marriage must take place as soon as possible."

"It is very easy to say that, my dear sir, and I cannot sufficiently admire your conduct, which, as far

as I know, is quite unprecedented, under the circumstances. But how about the old lady?"

John meditated for some minutes. At last he said, very slowly, and Mr. Forbes saw how much it cost him: "Would it be any use my going down to speak to her?"

"I hardly think so. She refuses to listen to her own son, I believe; but you can try."

"I will," replied John. And he walked away from the lawyer's office like one in a dream.

"That fellow's of the stuff that heroes are made of, in spite of his face," said the lawyer, as the door closed behind his visitor. "Who ever heard of a man going to plead his rival's cause with that rival's own mother?"

The estrangement from her son had begun to tell upon Mrs. Cartaret's health. She passed most of her time in bed. It bored her to get up and receive the neighbours, who of course inquired for Lowndes. She could not see to read much; she wrote voluminous letters, and answers arrived, containing awful pictures of the state of France. Her thoughts had no other diversion from the one topic which engrossed

them. And, at last, towards the middle of August, she really fell ill, not as ill as she herself fancied—not ill enough, perhaps, to justify her writing to Lowndes, “Are you going to let me die without seeing you again?”

That evening’s train brought him to Beckworth. She revived at the very sight of him, like a drooping flower put into water; her black eyes sparkled, and she sat up, talking so briskly, that Lowndes’s anxiety was at once relieved. He had been called from town under false pretences; but he did not regret it, for now that he was here, he made up his mind that he would not go back without seeing Maud. He came to this determination while he sat there by his mother’s bed, answering her questions as to his changed life and pursuits in a manner so different from the *cui bono* raillery to which she was accustomed, that she asked herself with amazement if this was her indolent, sarcastic son.

Before he left her for the night, he said: “I shall go to Salisbury for a few hours to-morrow, and the following day I must return to town.”

“Why go back so soon?” cried the old lady, in a whining voice. “It is six months since you were

here. Come, sois gentil, mon enfant, stay a few days with me—hein ? ”

“ I should only be unhappy, mother. When two people don't agree upon the subject which is nearest to the heart of one of them, they are better apart.”

“ Comment ! Est-il possible ? You have not yet forgotten that miserable girl ? ”

“ Have not forgotten, and never shall forget her. My life may be made wretched by your separating us, of course ; for without your consent she never will marry me, but——”

“ That she never shall have ! ” burst in Mrs. Cartaret, punching the pillow violently with her little fist.

“ So you have already told me. And, therefore, I am better away from Beckworth.”

“ Are you not ashamed to tell me, sir, that a creature like this is to separate mother and son ? ”

“ That is not her fault. She has refused to let me write to her. I shall see her to-morrow for the first time in six months.”

“ You shall see her ? Mon Dieu ! You shall see her ? ”

“ I wish to tell her that though we are separated

for a while, nothing will ever change me. And I wish to let her know that I have been trying, by my life, during the last six months, to make myself a little less unworthy of her."

"Unworthy of her? Mon Dieu! Listen to him! Unworthy of her!"

"Yes," said Lowndes, who was by this time roused, in spite of his determination to be calm. "The fact is, she is so different to those miserable samples of humanity you regard as correct young ladies, that you can't understand her. She has nothing in common with the cut-and-dried bread-and-butter that comes out of schools and convents (and turns rancid in one's mouth after marriage, ten to one). She is a real, honest girl—nothing sham about her——"

"She came here under a sham name!" cries Mrs. Cartaret.

"—and noble, as uncommonly few aristocrats are, or ever were, in the days of your favourite 'grand monarque,'" persists Lowndes, regardless of his mother's interruption. "However, it is no use talking about it, mother. It only makes us both angry. During the short time I am to be here, let

there be peace. Only don't deceive yourself. No power on earth shall ever make me give the girl up, and I shall never come back to Beckworth, to remain, until you will receive her. And now—good-night."

But it was far from a good night for poor Mrs. Cartaret. Restless, and dissatisfied with herself, with her son, and with all the world, she passed the sleepless hours, tossing feverishly among her pillows, and muttering, like the prince so pitilessly immortalised by Carlyle, "Est-il possible? Mon Dieu! est-il possible?"

Maud was crossing the quaint little market-place, bringing home some fruit for Mrs. Hicks, when she started, and nearly let her basket fall. In front of her, barring her road, stood Lowndes; and now he had hold of both her hands, and was looking into her eyes. A joy, which it was vain to conceal, danced there, and hovered round her lips. She reproached herself afterwards for testifying thus her real feeling: it was weak, but she could not help it.

"The six months are nearly past," he began, "and I have obeyed you in never writing. I shouldn't have been so patient if I hadn't seen Lady Herriesson constantly, and learnt two things:

first, that you had not left this, secondly, that—my jealousy of a certain person was unfounded. And now I'm come just to gladden my eyes by a glimpse of you, to tell you that I am unchanged in one thing, though changed, I hope, in many others. I've not been idle ; I have really worked hard all this time—keeping the fear of you before my eyes," he added, laughing.

"I am so glad to hear it," she replied. "You could not tell me anything that would give me greater pleasure."

"And now, will you trust me? Will you be patient yet a little while, Maud? My mother is in the hands of those devils of servants. If there were only some unprejudiced person to argue the case with her! However, sooner or later she will come round, I am confident. She has too good a heart not to listen to its dictates."

Maud shook her head. "She will never listen to them, in this case. Do not waste your life on a chimera."

"I am not wasting my life. I am turning it now to some account, with one hope and object in view."

“It makes me happy,” said Maud, gently, “to think that any words of mine should have tended to work this change. I did not expect it. We won’t talk about the hope, we will put that aside. You will grow happier, I am sure, every year by working; you would have grown more dissatisfied, more miserable, each year by dissipation.”

He stopped, as he walked along beside her, and whispered with a smile: “But as our friend the parson would say, ‘Man doth not live by bread alone.’”

“Perhaps in one sense, the happiest are those who ask for nothing else but their bread. By-the-by, I am going out to work for mine again. I leave this next week.”

“Good heavens! I thought you would remain with this old lady until—in short, for the present.”

“‘The present’ has lasted six months. She is the kindest, dearest old soul, but I have no excuse for remaining any longer. She is quite well again.”

He kicked viciously at a stone that lay in his path. “And where do you mean to go?”

“To my old nurse in London. There I can look about me, and see what there is to be done.

He implored her to give up this idea. He brought forward every argument against it; but in vain.

“I had but one excuse to plead for running away from Mortlands as I did. I would not be dependent on Sir Andrew any longer. Can I now be dependent on Mrs. Hicks? I have been of service during her illness and recovery, that I know. But the necessity for her having a companion is over, and with it I must go.”

To this resolve she held fast, in spite of all that Lowndes could urge. The utmost concession he could gain was that she promised to let him know when her course of life was decided. They walked for a long time under the broad-spreading trees of the Close, so long, indeed, that the clock had fully chimed the hour of Mrs. Hicks's early dinner ere Maud had put her hand in his, and bade him godspeed. She had promised nothing; she had repeated over and over again that it was folly to live on such hope as his; she had told him that the wisest thing he could do was to go away and forget her; but he left Salisbury, for all that, more resolute than ever to conquer the difficulties that lay in the way of his happiness, though still at a loss how to attack them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was one of the few very hot days of that summer, and Mrs. Cartaret was up and dressed; not, as she declared, that she felt any better, but rather worse, after a sleepless night. It was in honour of her son, whom she expected back shortly, that she had had her fauteuil placed under the awning on the terrace, and now sat there clad in white raiment—a very peculiar figure, with her silver hair brushed back, and a huge green fan wherewith she tried to coax a little breeze up from the sun-struck sheet of water in the park below.

She was not alone. A visitor was with her, who had just come down by the London train. He sat in a garden-chair, which he had drawn close to hers—closer, I suppose, than any of her punctilious old French courtier friends would ever have done. But

this man was neither punctilious nor a courtier—a shy man, on the contrary, only so deeply interested in what he was saying as to forget all else. We will take up the conversation at a point where the visitor, after pleading with all his eloquence the cause of a certain young lady, ended thus: “Believe me, ma’am, I should not be here to-day, to try and disabuse your mind of the prejudice it has contracted—I confess not without cause—about Miss Pomeroy, were I not as sure of her purity and nobility of soul, as I am that there is a Heaven above us!”

“Ah! sir, I loved her. I really loved the girl in those few weeks she was here. But to find that she was deceiving me and decoying my son all the time!”

“Decoying? You know her, indeed, very little to use such a word in connection with her. It is evident that your mind has been poisoned on this subject.”

“Bah! Perhaps you defend her conduct altogether? Perhaps you find it *comme il faut* for a young lady to run away from home, and make herself to be talked of by the servants’ hall?”

“I do not defend her conduct in leaving her

home as she did. I think she was highly blamable. But there are allowances to be made. She was young, high-spirited, and had suffered much. She felt that she did not belong to any one; that what was done for her was done more from a conventional necessity—more as an alms—than from love; and her independent spirit, when they tried to force a hateful marriage on her, could brook it no longer. That is the history of her running away. I don't defend it, ma'am; but at least there is some excuse for her, and, after all, she injured no one but herself by her exceeding folly."

"Sir, she has injured my son, and she has injured me. She has made us to quarrel—she has made Lowndes to say things, and to act in a way——" the old lady brushed the tears from her eyes. "It's very hard. I, who would have sacrificed my life to him, to have a little coquine like this coming between us. When I begged him, when I prayed him to marry, why, out of all the world, must he go and choose this girl?"

"Because, out of all the world, she is the only one who has been able to inspire him with a real attachment."

“Bah! He does not know his own mind.”

“It has not changed in six months’ absence.”

“Ah! so he says. He is obstinate, my dear sir, as a pig; and if I give way I shall seem to be a sotté, a weak old fool, to all the world.”

“To the few whose judgments are worth anything, Mrs. Cartaret, you will seem a wise mother, who values the true interests of her son more than all the world’s gossip. Is the world’s opinion really worth so much that you put it for a moment in competition with your son’s happiness?”

“Ah! if it was really for his happiness! If I thought that—if I could be sure of it! Look you here, sir. Perhaps you think I am a selfish old woman who wants no belle fille to interfere with her authority? You are quite wrong. I am ready to make my paquet, and go board in a convent, and leave this clear for the wife of my son. But I will have that his wife shall be sans reproche, do you understand?”

The young man looked at her almost sternly for a moment. Then he said very gravely: “Who is without reproach in the eyes of God? Do you think your son is? Do you remember what his past has

been—is there not much to be forgiven him? God judges not as man judges. The world's code is not His. Do you remember who it was who said, when an unfaithful wife was brought before him, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her?' Shall that divine lesson of charity be thrown away upon us, Mrs. Cartaret? If God were extreme to mark what has been amiss in our lives, which of us would escape? In this case, consider, has not the good she has done been far greater than the evil? Will you cast a stone—the stone that malicious people have put into your hand—at a girl who has wrought this blessed change in your son's life? She has been, and is, the good angel standing in his path, and turning him aside from destruction. Oh! Mrs. Cartaret, pause before it be too late. If you now withhold your consent, you are casting a stone at her which you will bitterly repent hereafter!"

He spoke with deep feeling, and the old lady's tears fell fast.

"Do you really believe that this change in Lowndes is all her doing? Ah, it is not possible; a girl like that to influence a man like Lowndes. No; it is incredible."

Miles looked at his watch.

“I have but five minutes more, Mrs. Cartaret. Excuse me for a moment, if I speak of myself. Do you know why I am come here to-day? Can you guess what feeling is strong enough to bring me from London simply for the purpose of having this conversation with you? It is the result of a struggle with myself, and of a fervent prayer that she whom I have loved better than anything on earth—yet feeling that my love was hopeless—for more than four years, might be made happy. After this avowal, Mrs. Cartaret (an avowal which would be no news to your son), perhaps you will not expect me to doubt Miss Pomeroy’s power. If it be so deep and lasting over a man whom she has never loved, what may it not be, under God’s blessing, over your son? She has done much, she will do more, for she does love him. I have said all I can say. My small part is played. I take my leave, feeling sure, Mrs. Cartaret, that you will not wither the happiness of two young lives.”

“Stay! Hollà, Dapper! Who is there? Bring some wine; you cannot go without a glass, sir. Will you not stay and see my son? He will be home directly.”

“ Thank you ; I should miss the train ; and Mr. Cartaret and I are not acquainted ; he would not care to see me. My visit was to you alone, Mrs. Cartaret. Good-by.”

“ You are a good man, a very good man. If all the curés were like you I would go to church oftener. I wish you would stay—I wish you would stay and see Lowndes. But, sir, you have eased my mind. I seem to see my way cleared. I did not know whom to believe, what to determine. After what you have said, I suppose there is no doubt, eh ? I must yield ; I must not throw stones. Well, my heart seems lighter, though my old eyes are full of tears. God bless you ! You are a good man.”

Lowndes, in his dogcart, passed Miles close to the station. The curate recognized the young squire, of course, and walked straight on. A Frenchman, after rendering another a signal service, would probably have waived ceremony, and stopped to introduce himself ; but Miles was an Englishman all over. Besides, he had no desire to speak to Lowndes ; it would have been a painful effort to him. On the contrary, he had just done what he conceived to be his duty, and there was an end of it. Cartaret, on

his side, stared, and wondered whether his eyes or his memory deceived him. He had a distinct recollection of Miles's face and figure. This could not be he, for what could he possibly be doing at Beckworth? but was there ever such a likeness? And so they passed each other, and went each his way, one to the hard crusts of life, the other to its cakes and ale.

Mrs. Cartaret got up as her son approached, stood on tiptoe, and fell upon his neck. There were the traces of recent tears on her cheeks, and, through her smiles, it was easy to see that she was in a state of considerable excitement. Lowndes knew at once that something had happened.

“Well, mauvais garnement, and so you have seen her?”

“Yes, I have seen her. But what has come to you, mother? What is the matter? Has any one been here?”

“Yes, some one has been here; an angel with a red face, mon enfant.”

“Nonsense! You don't mean—— Then it was he, after all! But what on earth did he come here for?”

“ Ah, what, indeed! What do angels generally come for? ”

“ I haven't an idea. I only know one. My acquaintance has been more the other way.”

“ *Fi donc!* But you are ranged now, *mon fils*, *n'est-ce pas?* You will have no more to do with naughtiness—hein? ”

“ That depends. Not if I have an angel always with me.”

“ Answer me one question, sir. Have you given up all your bad ways, for sake of your angel? *Foi de gentilhomme*, is this truly her doing? ”

“ Solely hers. No other power on earth, I think, could have made me work.”

“ A pretty compliment to me, *va-t-en!* But no matter, if it is true; I will swallow the pill and not make a bad face. And now, sir, are you bent upon running away from your old mother, to-morrow? ”

He would have said yes, but something in his mother's face made him hesitate. Could it be that this curate, in the course of a short visit, had wrought the miracle which Lowndes had been labouring for six months to accomplish and had failed?

“ Perhaps it is the last request she will ever

make of you," continued Mrs. Cartaret, stretching up to part the hair from his brow, and then holding his face tenderly, for a moment, between her fat little hands. "You, and Beckworth, and all will very soon pass away from her. The reins are slipping from her hands, and it is time that the old woman was unseated, isn't it?"

He said nothing, but caught her in his arms.

As he leaned out of his window that night, smoking a cigar, he had but one regret. "How I wish I hadn't passed him. That fellow is a trump. I would walk fifty miles to shake him by the hand. None of the fellows I know would ever have done such a thing. It's incomprehensible. Is it his religion, or is it his nature, that has made him what he is? Ah, Maud, this red-faced parson is worth a dozen of me, if love went by merit. But, happily for me, it doesn't!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MAUD was in the parlour, the following afternoon, entertaining a spinster friend of Mrs. Hicks's, who had called. But Mrs. Hicks was out, and the bore of talking and listening to this maundering, though no doubt very amiable, lady, devolved on Maud. She was at her wit's end. They had talked about the Queen; they had discussed whether her Majesty would come out more next year or not. The visitor had repeated with pride some anecdotes of the princesses which she had captured, and which showed a sort of connection, however remote, with the highest circles. After which, they had deplored the unusual drought, and lamented over the approaching flower-show, which was sure to be a failure, in consequence, and then they came to a dead stop. There is no knowing what subject the spinster, by her own un-

assisted efforts, would next have pumped up, but that a carriage, at that moment, stopped at the gate. Maud rose and went to the window. Was it another of these inflictions? She could see nothing by reason of the privet hedge, and sat down again, feeling that another visitor of this sort would be almost more than she could bear.

There was a minute's interval, and then the parlour-door was thrown open, and Mrs. Cartaret was announced.

Maud started to her feet, but she was conscious of nothing for a few seconds. Then her heart seemed to be rising in her throat; she stood there, she could not go forward, while the old lady advanced towards her, holding out her arms, and Maud fell into them. The spinster, fluttered at the entry of a county lady who had very seldom been seen in Salisbury, and, furthermore, by the demonstrative character of the greeting she witnessed, murmured some inaudible formula of farewell, and slid out of the room.

“My dear,” cries Mrs. Cartaret, as soon as the door is closed, “I have done you horrible injustice. I have said all sorts of hard things of you; will you forgive me? I have come out here all this way to

ask you ; and if you will not, I shall go back and make my son miserable. I have been very angry—oh ! I tell you frankly—I have been very angry, and I would listen to nothing he said. We have had a desperate quarrel. But in the end, see, it is not he who has asked ; it is I who have proposed to come to you, and alone, too. I have left him at the inn. What I do, I do by myself, of my own will. I am not dragged by the hairs of my head, hein ? Do you understand ? ”

“ I do, dear Mrs. Cartaret, and I appreciate it.”

“ I do not forget the past, Mary. If I lived to be a thousand years, I should still regret that we came to know each other as we did. But that does not prevent my seeing what you have done for Lowndes. It seems that love for you has ranged him at last. He will no longer dissipate his time upon nonsenses. He works steady, and sees no more bad company. Je vous en fais mes compliments. And I honour you for your proper pride. It seems that unless I come and say, ‘ Mademoiselle, do me the honour to become my son’s wife,’ you will not marry him ? Well, I applaud you. I did the same myself—moi qui vous parle. I refused the

heir to an old title, because his family did not receive me cordially. Therefore, I am come, you see, my dear, en personne, that you may be satisfied."

"And I am satisfied, dear Mrs. Cartaret, if I only know that the doubts you entertained about me are cleared. My conduct fully justified your suspicions, I admit. It was most natural that you should resent your son's attachment to me. I had but to bend my head and submit to your decree, whatever it was."

"Well, up to yesterday, my dear, I was obdurate. I was miserable, for I saw that Lowndes would never be the same to me again, until I gave in. But I was firm; for I thought it was for his future good, and I hated you. Then came one who talked to me for an hour, and to such good purpose, that all my fine resolutions melted away. There, can you guess who that was, petite? The young curé with the coupe-rosé face. I could not resist the Church's eloquence; he put things in such a way! He talked such a beautiful religion, my dear. You have to thank him for it all."

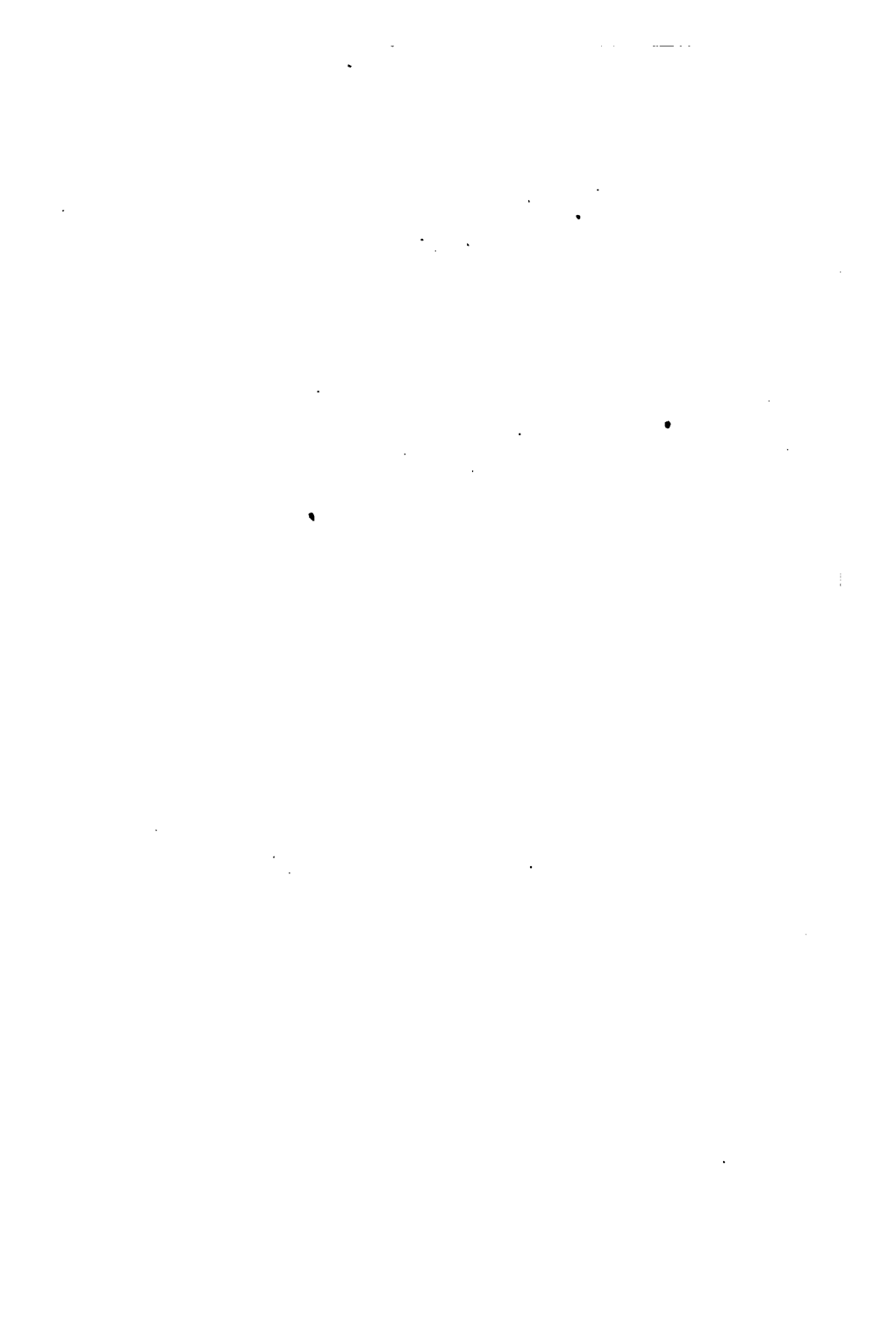
"And I deserve so little at his hands!" said Maud, colouring.

“Ah ! que voulez-vous ?” cried the old lady, shrugging her shoulders. “C’est toujours comme ça ! And now let us make short work of this. I chased you from Beckworth as the maid : I invite you to return as its mistress. I am old, and horribly lazy. I lie in bed, and let things go—au diable ! vrai—n’est-ce pas ? My good Rouse and Dapper are treasures, petite—yes, treasures, but, somehow, I can’t manage them any more. I shall be glad to give it all up, and to cry, ‘La reine est morte—vive la reine !’”

“The queen never will die for me !” exclaimed Maud, throwing her arms round Mrs. Cartaret’s neck. As she spoke the door opened, and Lowndes’s radiant face beamed joyously upon the group before him. The next moment there was a sort of triune embrace, in which it was impossible to determine whose arms were round whose neck, and with this tableau it may be as well to let the curtain drop.

EPILOGUE.

READER, one word at parting. Let no young lady follow our Maud's example, anticipating like results. We agree with the county at large in thinking that she was "an uncommonly lucky girl." Starting from a false basis of principle, she had done her best to become an Ishmael, and, lo! Fate willed that the lot and inheritance of Isaac should be hers. Mrs. Cartaret still rules, in outward semblance, at Beckworth; but the sceptre has really passed, as she desired, into younger and stronger hands. His wife's influence over Lowndes has never waned, and she has found, at last, more peace and contentment than falls to the lot of most human beings, "in that state of life into which it hath pleased God to call" her.



the 1990s, the number of people who are employed in the service sector has increased in all countries. The increase is most pronounced in the United States, where the service sector has become the dominant sector of the economy.

The increase in the service sector has led to a change in the way that people work. In the past, most people worked in manufacturing or agriculture, where they were employed by a single employer. In the service sector, however, people are more likely to be self-employed or to work for a small business. This has led to a change in the way that people are organized into teams.

In the past, teams were often formed by a manager who assigned people to a team. In the service sector, however, teams are often formed by the people themselves. This is because people in the service sector are more likely to be self-employed or to work for a small business. This has led to a change in the way that teams are organized.

In the past, teams were often organized in a hierarchical way. In the service sector, however, teams are often organized in a flat way. This is because people in the service sector are more likely to be self-employed or to work for a small business. This has led to a change in the way that teams are organized.

In the past, teams were often organized in a traditional way. In the service sector, however, teams are often organized in a modern way. This is because people in the service sector are more likely to be self-employed or to work for a small business. This has led to a change in the way that teams are organized.

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